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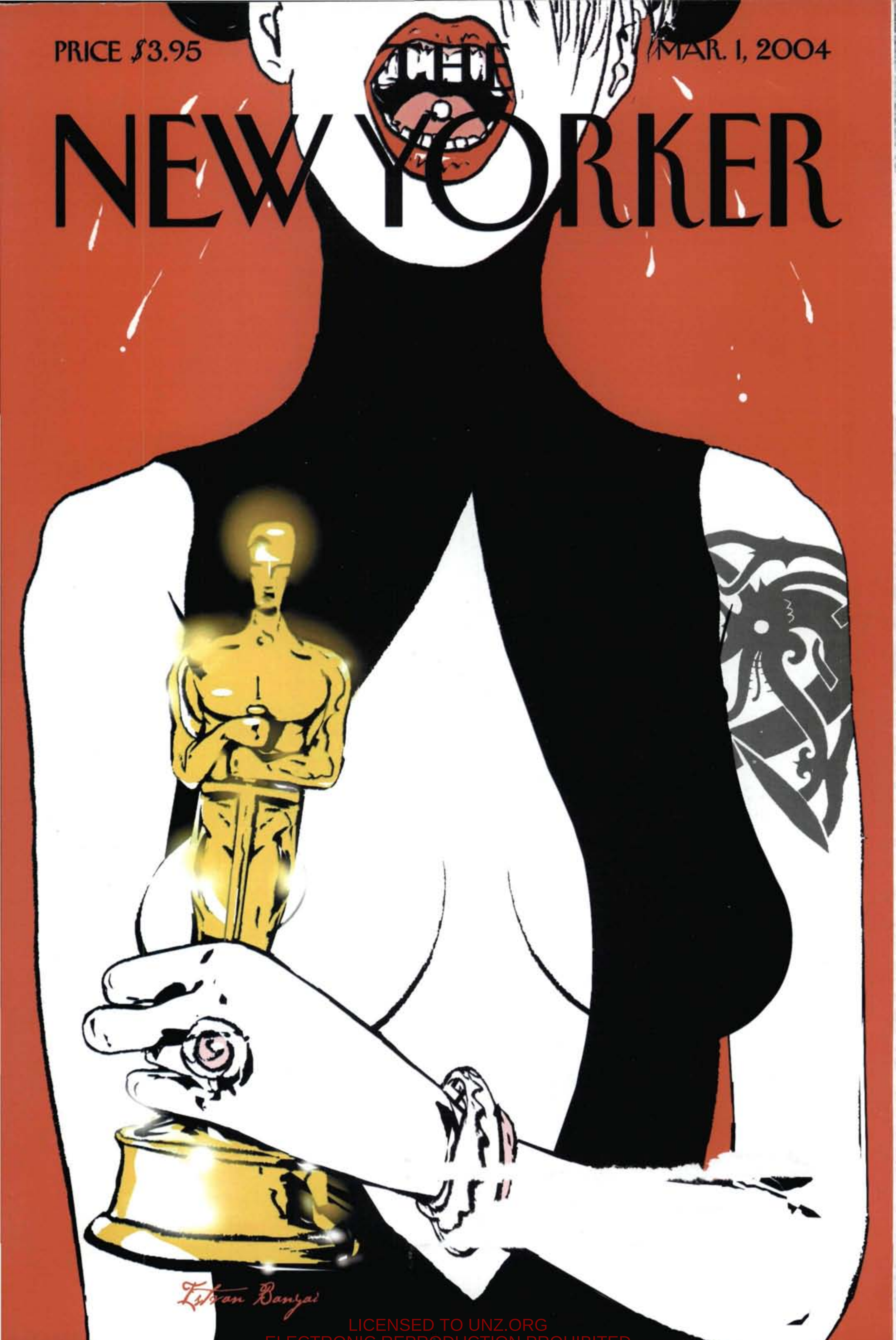
THE NEW YORKER

MAR. 1, 2004



Istvan Banyai

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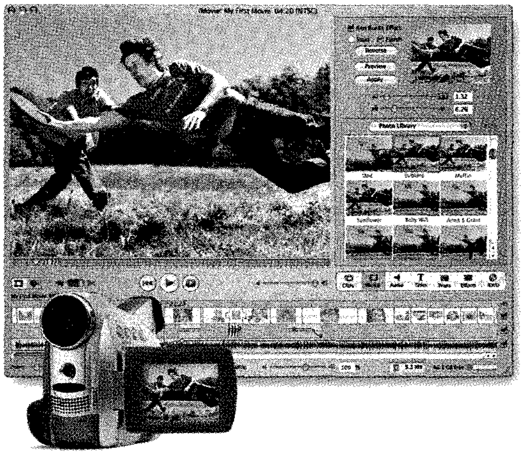

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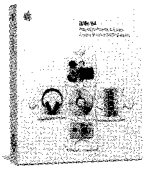

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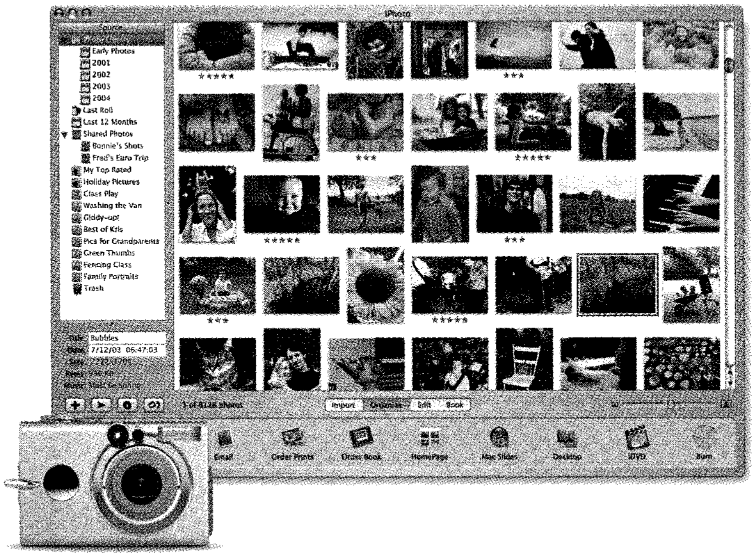
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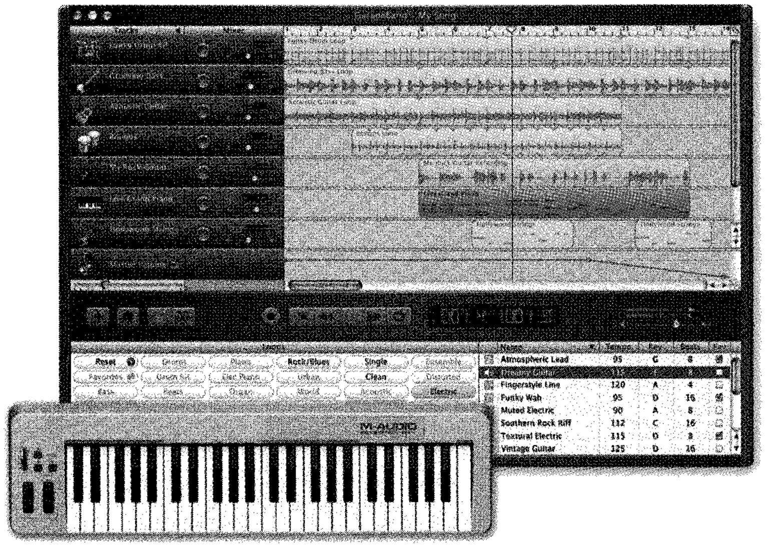
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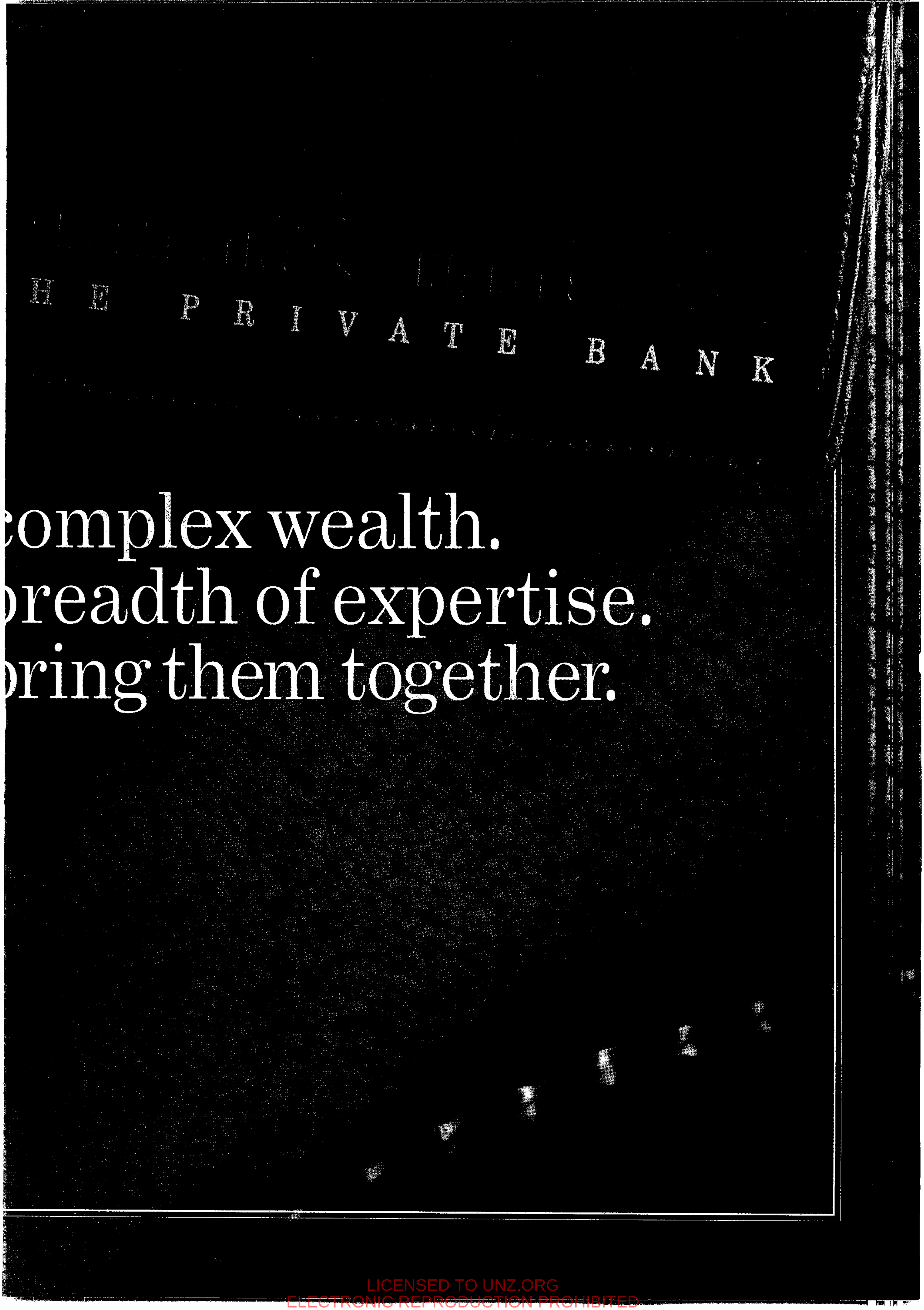
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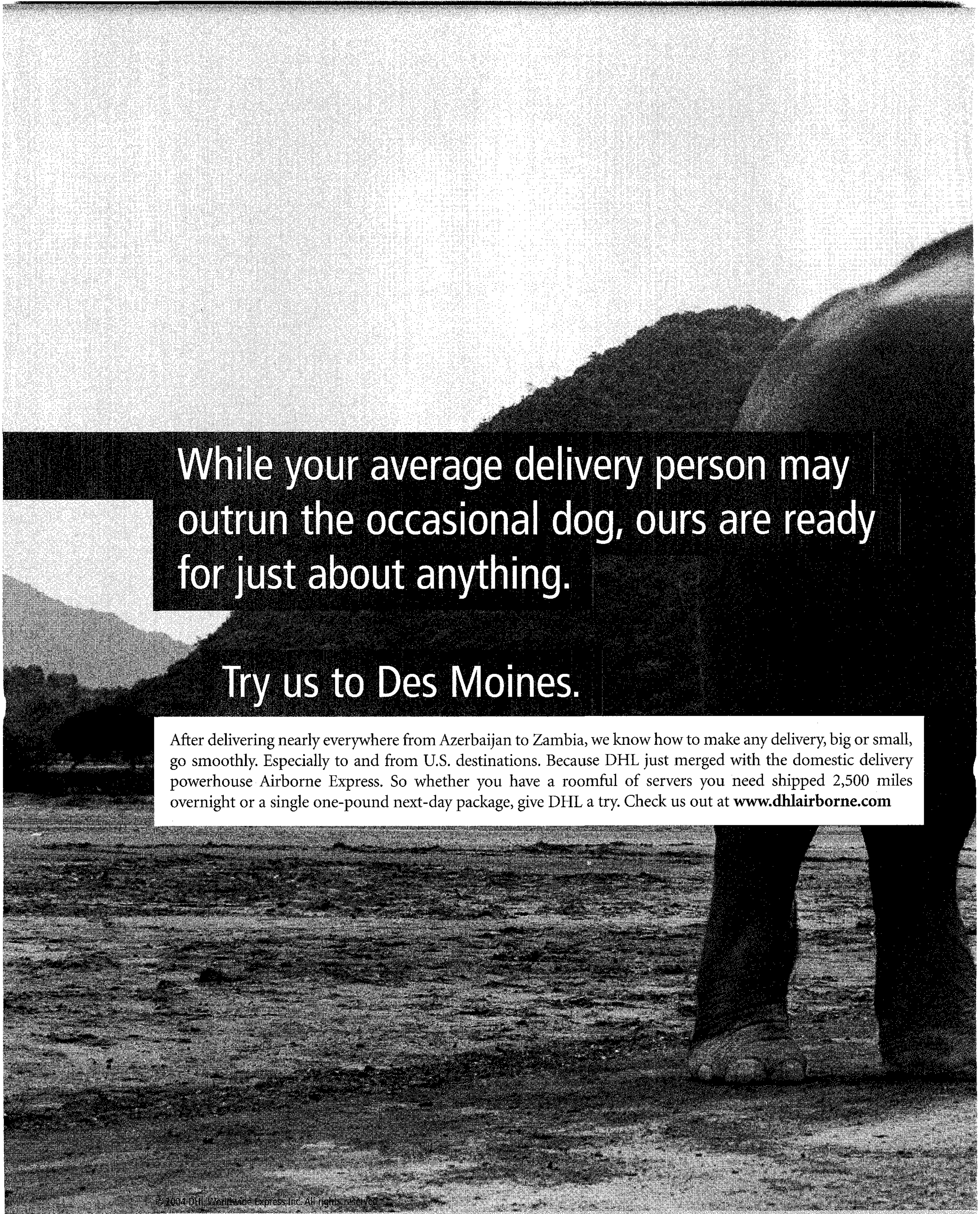

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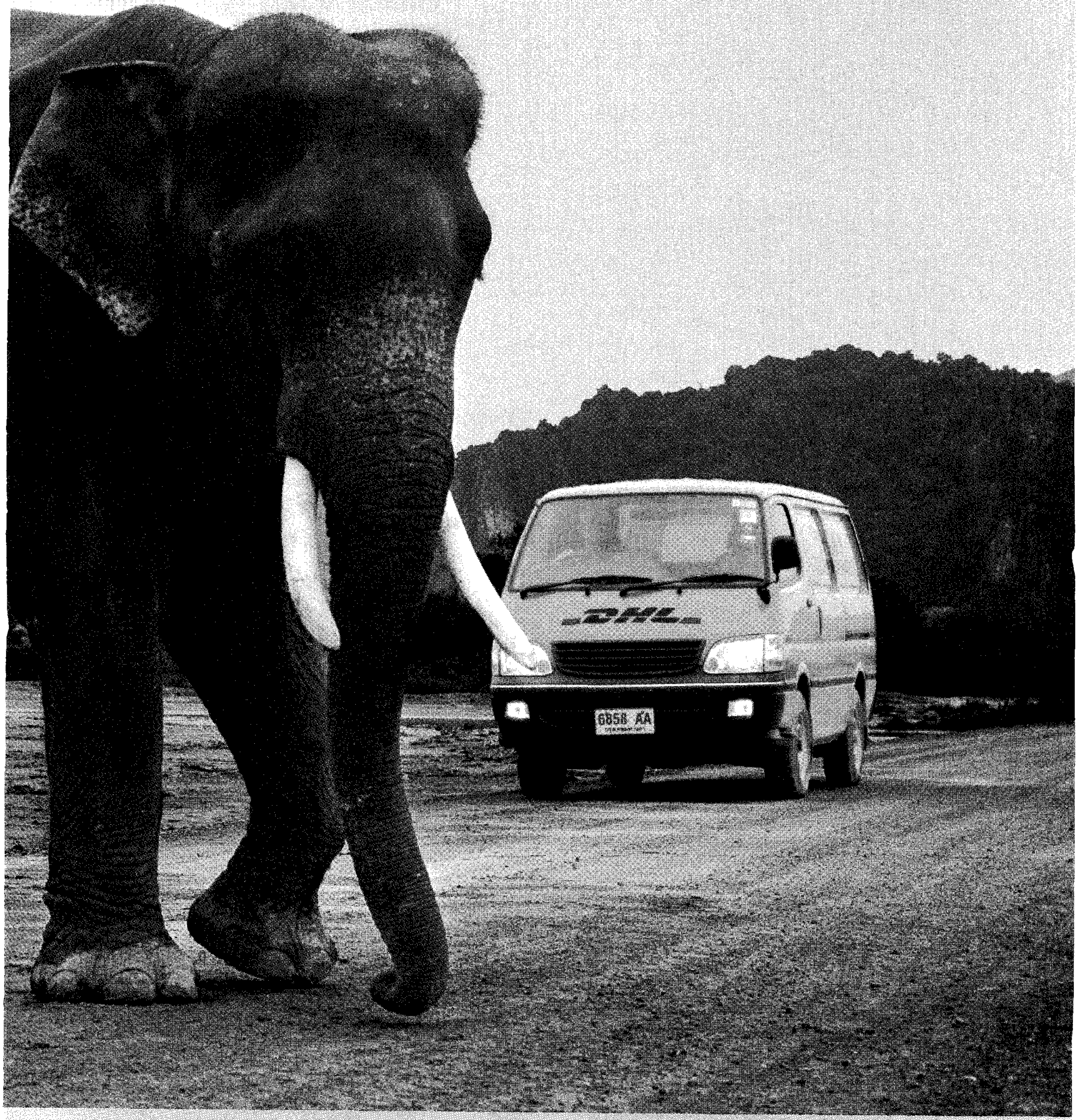

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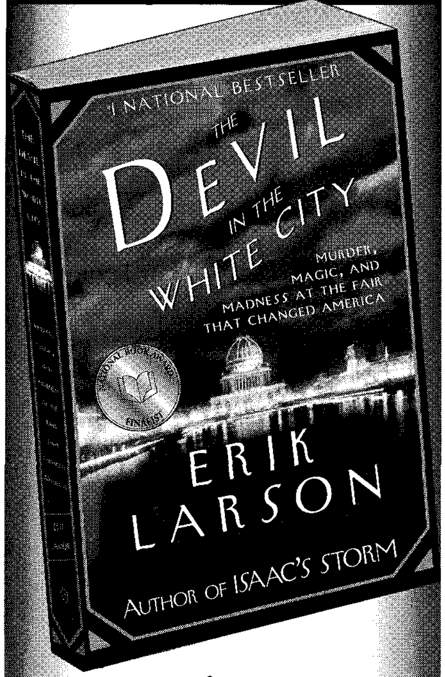
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MARCH 1, 2004

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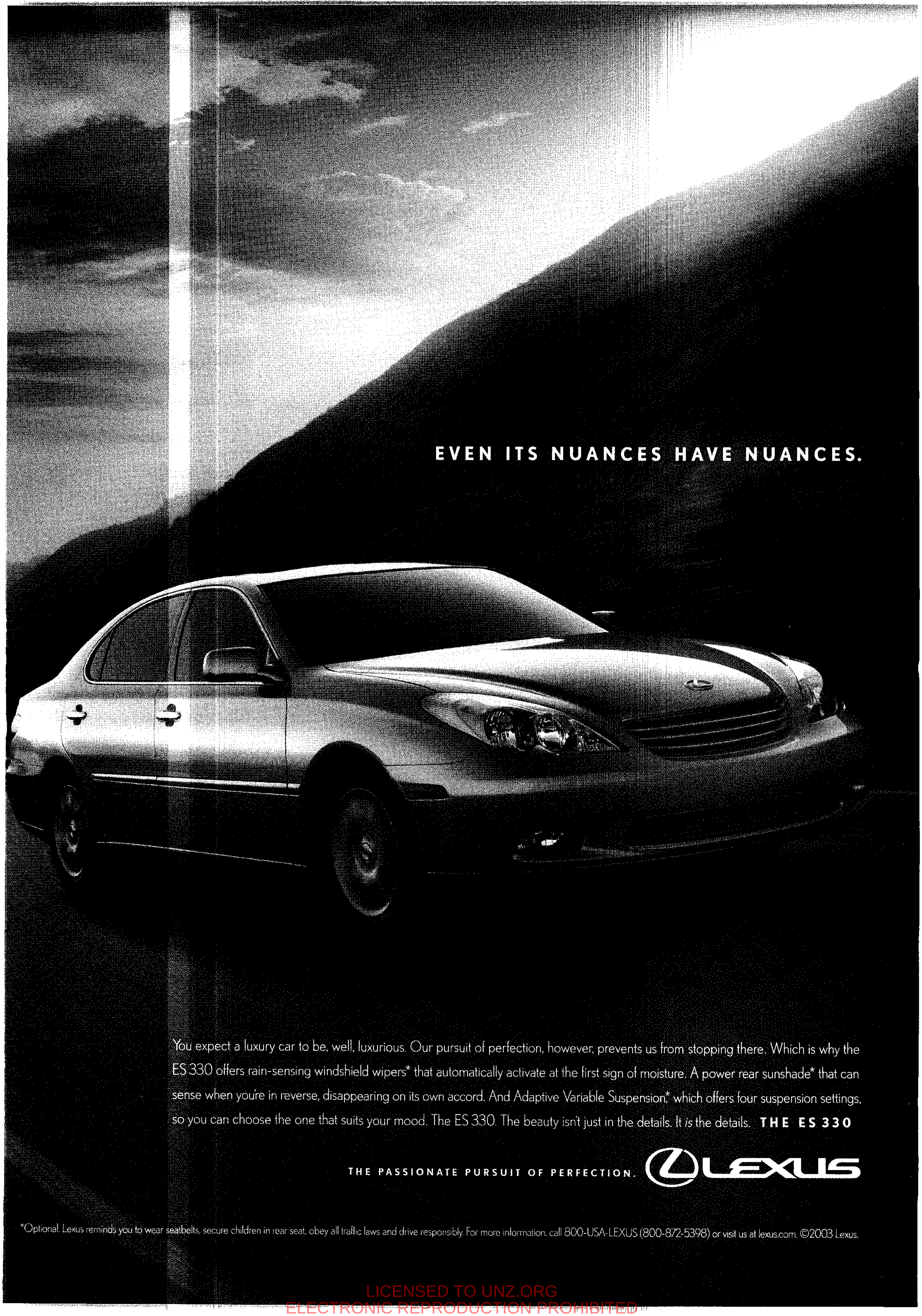

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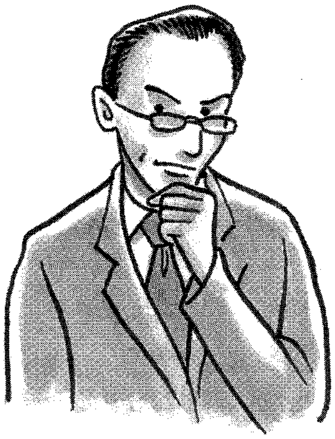

Q: A knee injury forced me to re-think pursuing a professional tennis career. I have been accepted into law school, but I think my heart will always be on the court.
Any thoughts?

Breakpoint,
Tucson, AZ

Dear Breakpoint,

I think I should sue you for wasting my time. Why give up a chance at a lucrative law career for months of intense rehab with no promise of financial security? Here's what you do – go easy on the knee and hit the books. As you were, counselor.

Game, set and match,
The Naysayer

CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Kolbert ("The Un-Communicator," p. 38) is a staff writer. A collection of her pieces about New York, "The Prophet of Love: And Other Tales of Power and Deceit," comes out in May.

William F. Buckley, Jr. ("Rabble-Rouser," p. 46), is a political columnist and the founder of *National Review*. His new book, "The Fall of the Berlin Wall," will be published next month.

Philip Gourevitch (Campaign Journal, p. 37) is covering the Presidential campaign for the magazine.

Andrew Barlow (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 44) is a freelance writer and musician.

David Young (Poem, p. 75) has published nine books of poetry, including "At the White Window." His translation "The Poetry of Petrarch" will appear in April.

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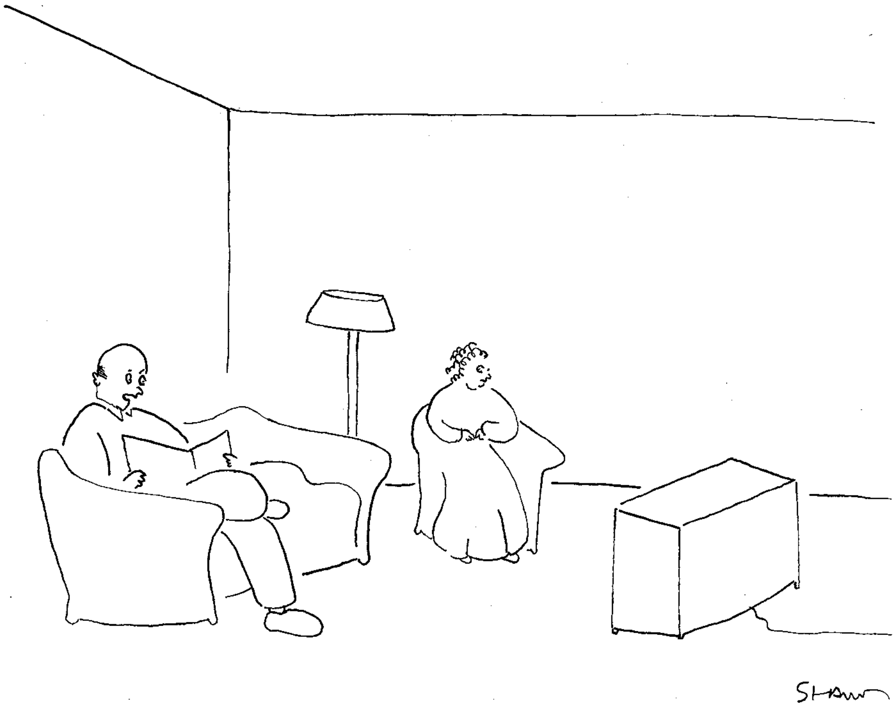
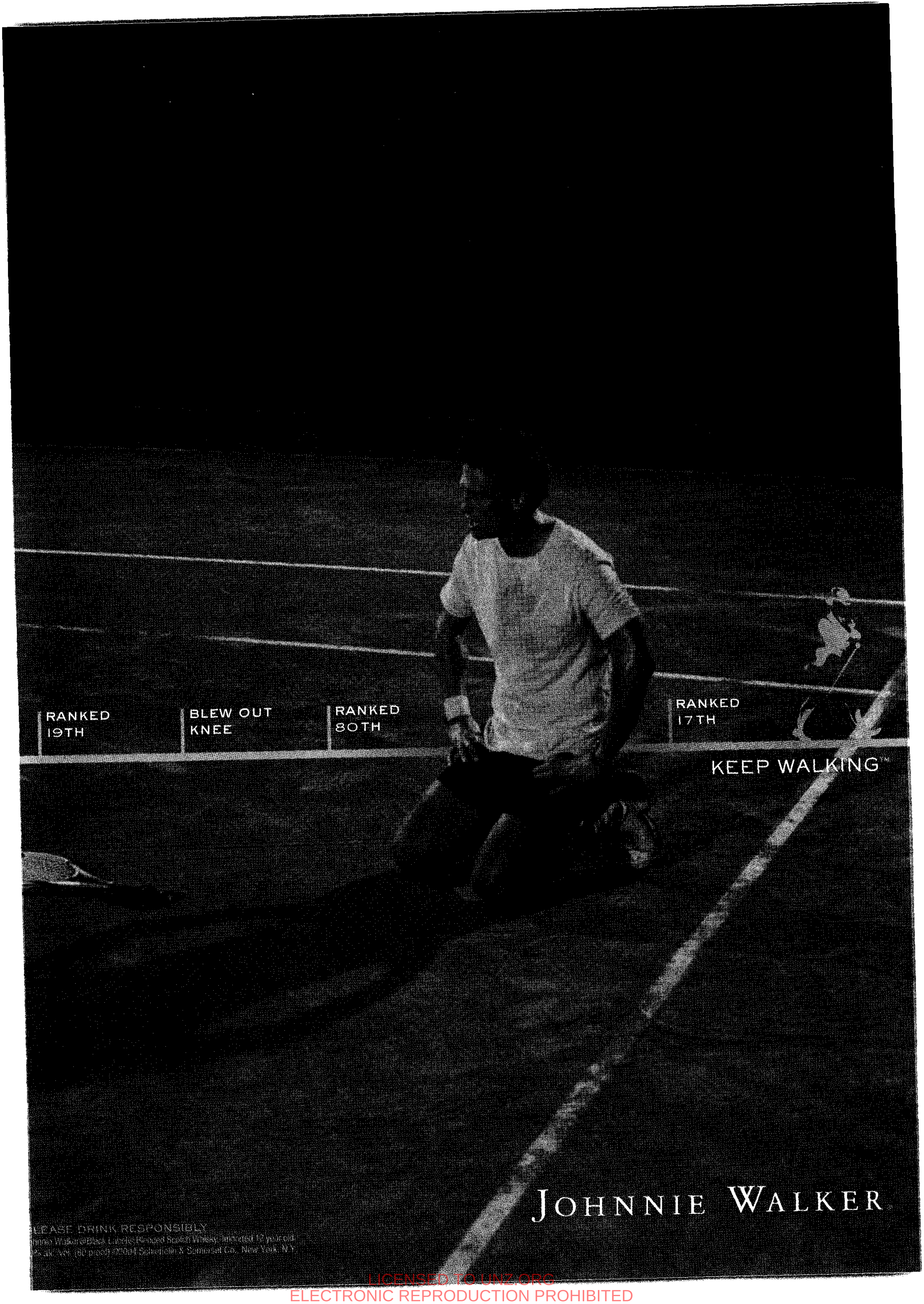
Christopher Caldwell (Books, p. 91) is a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard* and a columnist for the *Financial Times*.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 84) is a film critic for the magazine and the author of "American Sucker," which has just been published.

Istvan Banyai (Cover), the author of "Zoom," will publish his fourth children's book, "The Other Side," next year. ♦



"Gays and lesbians getting married—haven't they suffered enough?"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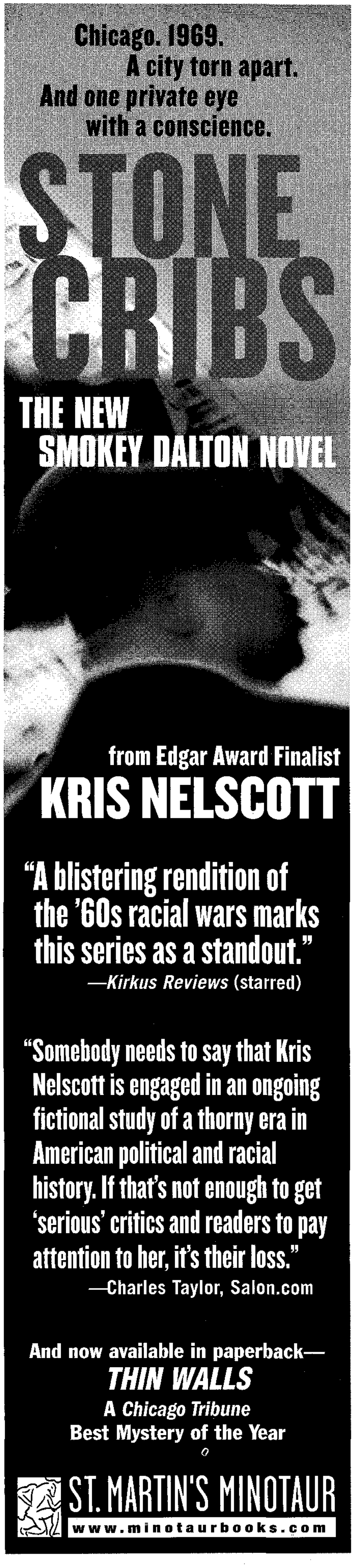
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THE WRONG MEDICINE

Reading Michael Specter's article on "nutraceuticals," I was struck by the rationales that people were able to come up with to justify allowing supplements with no known therapeutic value to be marketed to consumers, including patients suffering from cancer—for instance, that they should not be deprived of the opportunity to benefit from the "placebo effect" ("Miracle in a Bottle," February 2nd). Aside from the ethical, moral, and legal issues related to making such claims, what is the cost to people, in either delayed or forgone conventional treatment, of providing what is very likely false security? More fundamentally, doesn't society have a responsibility to protect its most vulnerable members from modern-day charlatans?
Alice H. Lichtenstein
Professor of Nutrition Science and Policy
Tufts University
Boston, Mass.

Specter rightly laments the lack of scientific support for the alleged benefits of many supplements. However, the cause is not so much deregulation as the absence of economic incentives to conduct needed research. In contrast to pharmaceutical companies that develop conventional drugs like Zocor or Viagra, the companies that produce and market natural dietary supplements generally have no proprietary rights to their products. It is no accident that the big drug companies haven't spent millions of dollars to determine whether Vitamin C or ginseng may in fact have beneficial qualities. If they did, they wouldn't be able to patent them and reap the financial reward. The F.D.A., for its part, sees the world almost entirely through the prism of its long-established complex set of rules for drug approval. Unless we can devise a new economic and regulatory framework, the public will likely never know whether some natural remedies can be safe and effective, while costing much less than conventional drugs.
Eldon V.C. Greenberg
Washington, D.C.

Specter observes that "Americans long ago wearied of taking doctors' orders." This is so because many basic issues, such as the screening of medical students, the education and discipline of doctors, and alternative medicine, are largely controlled by a health-care establishment resistant to productive change. This institutional unwillingness to acknowledge that the system has fundamental defects—and the pharmaceutical industry's uncritical support of physicians—has been very costly, and the public knows it. And consumers have, increasingly, responded by searching for more effective care on their own terms.
Lee Karr
Venice, Fla.

As Specter suggests, regulation is needed to insure that nutritional supplements do not cause harm and that they contain what they claim to contain. But to go further, as some are suggesting, and pass laws that would treat botanical substances like drugs, could effectively ban their use until time-consuming, expensive scientific tests are done. Without the big budgets of the pharmaceutical giants, many firms that provide natural products could not survive. But the F.D.A. does not need to test every herb to determine if it works. There is plenty of historical evidence (much more than for modern pharmaceuticals) that certain herbs are effective and safe—as Specter writes, many "have been ingested regularly, in every conceivable combination, for thousands of years." What is needed are manufacturing standards to insure that they have not been diluted, chemically altered, or overprocessed to the point of being harmful or ineffective. In Europe, such standards already exist.
Mary Hilterman
Portsmouth, Ohio

•

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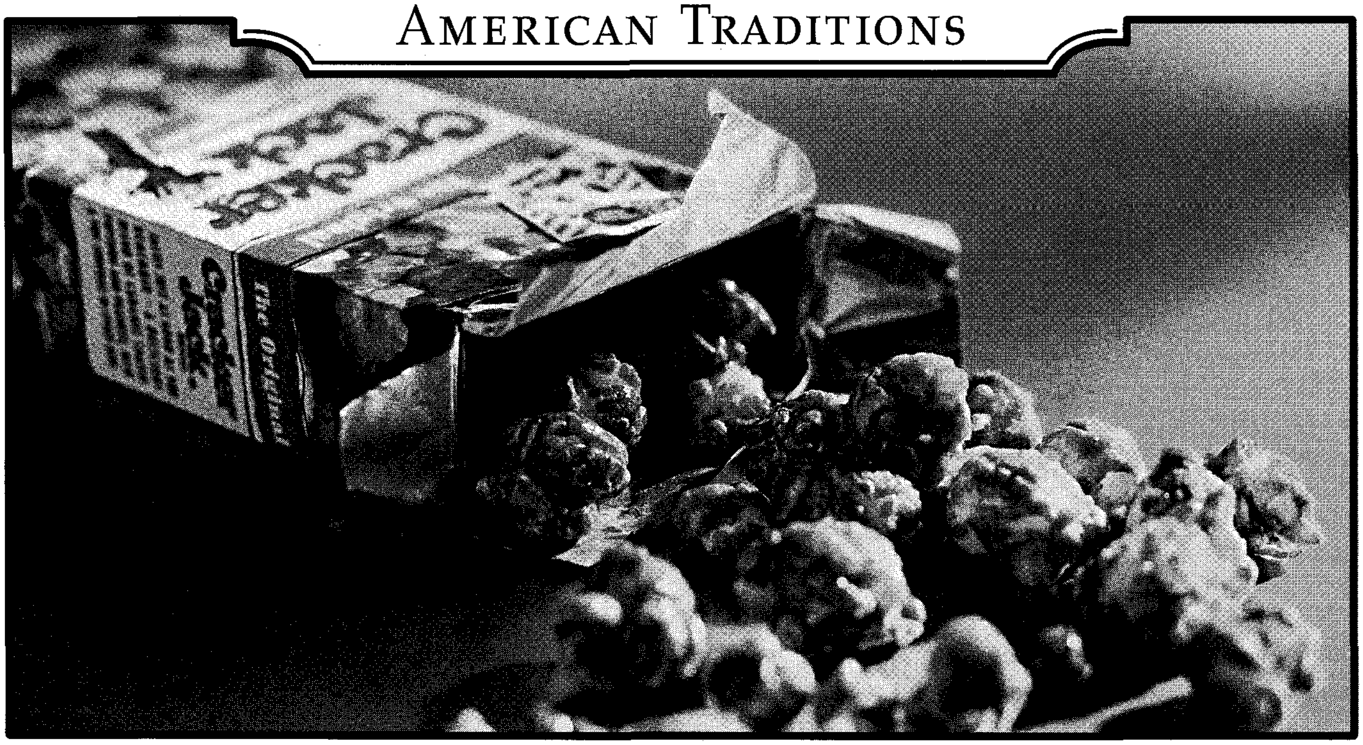

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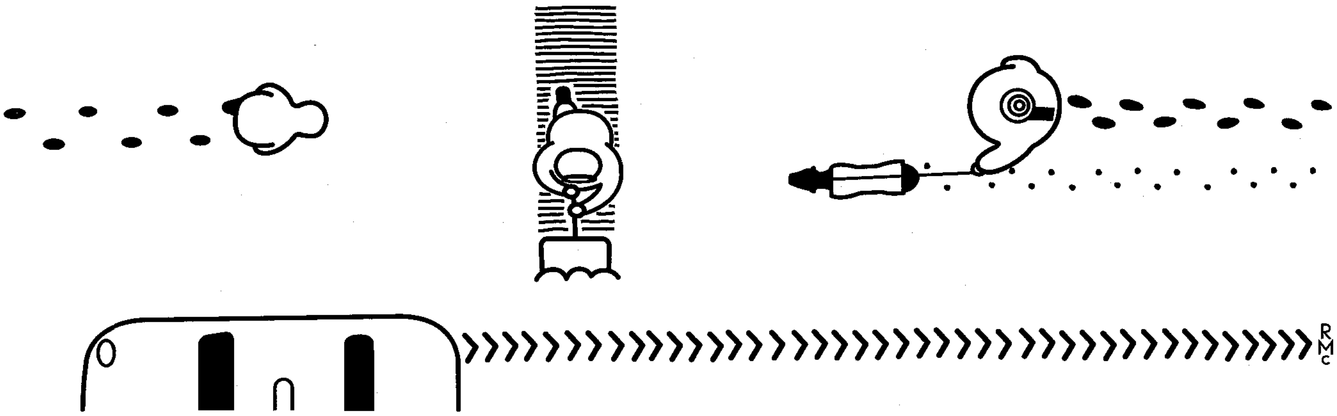

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29	1	2				

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THIS WEEK

WHERE THE LAND ENDS

Marlon Brando wasn't the only guy on the waterfront. The Museum of Modern Art has organized a two-week-long, eighteen-film homage to New York's aquatic edges to coincide with the publication of "Waterfront: A Journey Around Manhattan," a new book by Phillip Lopate. The festival includes experimental shorts by Joan Jonas ("Songdelay," from 1973), Mark Street ("Fulton Fish Market," from 2003), and others; features such as Josef von Sternberg's "The Docks of New York" (1928) and William Wyler's "Dead End" (1937); and a newsreel of the construction of the George Washington Bridge. Lopate will be on hand for an opening-night screening of Samuel Fuller's 1953 film, "Pickup on South Street," at 8:30. (Gramercy Theatre, starts Feb. 27; see Movies.)

BLACK LIGHT

John Bigham, a veteran guitarist who has played with everyone from Miles Davis to Eminem, is best known for his work with the funk-ska outfit Fishbone. In the late nineties, he paired up with the bassist Chris Thomas to form the funk duo the Soul of John Black. With eclectic songwriting that draws on folk and rock sources (there are hints of groups like the Velvet Underground) and vocals that evoke a weary Al Green, the band proves that there's still such a thing as R. & B. music for adults. (Feb. 27, Joe's Pub; see Night Life.)

TONE ALONE

The reclusive Italian count Giacinto Scelsi, who died in 1988, was one of the great loners of twentieth-century music. His mystical pieces, which are sometimes driven by the coloristic possibilities of a single tone, have attracted a fervent following. Sequitur, a group that brings a theatrical touch to recondite modern scores, offers a retrospective of Scelsi's works. (Miller Theatre, Feb. 26; see Classical Music.)

A tribute to the Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi, at Miller Theatre.

Mark Street's "Fulton Fish Market" and other films, at the Gramercy Theatre.

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

The Soul of John Black brings its mix of funk, R. & B., and rock to Joe's Pub.

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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BUG
Amanda Plummer and Michael Shannon star in a new play by Tracy Letts ("Killer Joe"), set in a hotel in Oklahoma City. Directed by Dexter Bullard. In previews. Opens Feb. 29 at 3. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St., at Seventh Ave. 212-239-6200.)

COOKIN'
The slapstick, "Iron Chef"-gone-haywire comedy from Seoul comes to the Minetta Lane Theatre for an open run after a successful season at the New Victory. Conceived and directed by Seung Whan Song. In previews. (18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-420-8000.)

EMBEDDED
In a timely satire written and directed by Tim Robbins, media frenzy and front-line blunders attend a conflict in the Middle East. A production of the Actors' Gang. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Alfred Molina is Tevye, Randy Graff is Golde, and Barbara Barrie is Yente in a new Broadway production of the musical, directed by David Leveaux. Two previews on Feb. 25. Opens Feb. 26 at 6:30. (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
A staged reading of a one-act version of Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge," in the ongoing lunchtime series, with Danny Aiello and Robert LuPone. Directed by Austin Pendleton. Feb. 25 at 12:30. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. 212-362-2560.)

KING LEAR
Christopher Plummer is Lear in a Lincoln Center Theatre production, directed by Jonathan Miller. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont. 212-239-6200.)

THE ROARING GIRLE
Alice Tuan's new play is an adaptation of a Jacobean drama about the London grifter Moll Cutpurse. With Okwui Okpokwasili as the title character and featuring John Epperson (Lypsinka). Directed by Melanie Joseph for the Foundry Theatre. In previews. Opens Feb. 28 at 9. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-868-4444.)

SEA OF TRANQUILITY
The Atlantic Theatre Company presents a new play by Howard Korder, about a Connecticut family who move to New Mexico and find it less relaxing than they had hoped. Directed by Neil Pepe. Opens Feb. 25 at 7. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

SMALL TRAGEDY
In a new play by Craig Lucas ("Prelude to a Kiss"), presented by Playwrights Horizons, a small-town production of Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" is undermined by infighting and intrigue among the cast. Directed by Mark Wing-Davey. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

WINTERTIME
Marsha Mason stars in a Second Stage production of a new romantic comedy by Charles L. Mee. Directed by David Schweizer. In previews. Opens March 2 at 7. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AUNT DAN AND LEMON
In the New Group's revival of Wallace Shawn's haunting and transcendent 1985 play, Lili Taylor plays Leonora, or Lemon, a woman who cultivates the garden of her memory in flashbacks dominated by a loquacious family friend she calls Aunt Dan (Kristen Johnston). Aunt Dan argues for the human face of fascism and reveals her desire for Henry Kissinger—whom she regards as one of the most eligible bachelors in the world (the political context is the nineteen-seventies). Just as Aunt Dan yearns to be overwhelmed by force—a male force—Lemon secretly desires to be overwhelmed by Aunt Dan. Directed by Scott Elliott. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/5/04.) (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

BEAUTIFUL CHILD
The Vineyard presents a new play by Nicky Silver, who wrote "Pterodactyls." This one is about a man who returns to the parental nest. George Grizzard and Penny Fuller lead the cast. Terry Kinney directs. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

BIG BILL
A. R. Gurney's new play tracks the rise and fall of Bill Tilden, the tennis superstar who won seven U.S. championships in the nineteen-twenties. John Michael Higgins plays Tilden. Directed by Mark Lamos. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

BRIDGE & TUNNEL
In Sarah Jones's one-woman show, a pun-loving Pakistani poet hosts a poetry slam in Queens, introducing a dozen immigrant spoken-word artists and fielding phone calls from his nervous wife. Jones creates a vivid personality and past for each of the characters, who include a Jamaican nanny who can't get a bank loan and an Eastern European Jewish grandmother who's tired of being patronized. Her most moving portrait is of a Chinese mother who not only comes to terms with her daughter's lesbianism but joins the fight to legalize gay marriage. Directed by Tony Taccone. (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

DOÑA ROSITA THE SPINSTER
In 1935, Federico García Lorca used the story of a mutable rose—which changes over the course of a single day from deep crimson to white to a withered husk—as the basis for the title character of this play: a woman who fades over the decades as she remains loyal to her absent fiancé. In

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Ernest Johns's production at the Cocteau Repertory, Amanda Jones makes a delicate Doña Rosita, and the vibrant supporting cast keeps the drama from feeling too heavy. (Bouwerie Lane, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-677-0060.)

DOUBLE INFIDELITY
Marivaux's romantic farce about a country girl, a commoner, a prince, and a palace beauty is staged at the Pearl. Directed by Beatrice Terry. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

DROWNING CROW
Marion McClinton directs a Manhattan Theatre Club production of a new play by Regina Taylor ("Crowns") about the reunion of a family of African-American artists. Alfre Woodard leads the cast. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

FIVE FLIGHTS
Adam Bock's comedy takes on the role of religion in society, the transformative power of love and faith, and the unexpected congruence of ice hockey and Russian ballet. With fine performances (most notably by Joanna P. Adler) from a cast of six. Directed by Kent Nicholson. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 29.)

THE LADIES
Four notorious first ladies—Elena Ceausescu, Madame Mao, Imelda Marcos, and Eva Perón—compare notes on the pros and cons of wielding power by proxy. Alison Weller is particularly good as Imelda. A production of the Civilians theatre company, in association with Dixon Place. Written by Anne Washburn and directed by Anne Kauffman. (Chashama, 111 W. 42nd St. 212-219-0736. Through Feb. 29.)

MAGIC HANDS FREDDY
Ralph Macchio ("The Karate Kid") and Michael Rispoli (Jackie Aprile in "The Sopranos") star in a new play by Arje Shaw about a masseur and his brother. Directed by Rebecca Taylor. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.)

MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN
Gwendolyn Mulamba ("The Blacks: A Clown Show") leads the cast in the Classical Theatre of Harlem's production of the Bertolt Brecht play. Directed by Christopher McElroen. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 29.)

THE ORWELL PROJECT
Two productions based on books by George Orwell play in repertory at the Connelly Theatre: Peter Hall's musical adaptation of "Animal Farm," directed by David Travis, and Alan Lyddiard's multimedia version of "1984," directed by Ginevra Bull. Presented by Synapse Productions. (220 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444. Through March 14.)

PERICLES
A new production of Shakespeare's drama, directed by Bartlett Sher for Theatre for a New Audience. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Through Feb. 28.)

POOR THEATER
The Wooster Group performs a work in progress. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-966-3651.)

ROULETTE
Larry Bryggman, Leslie Lyles, Ana Gasteyer, Anna Paquin, and Shawn Hatosy star in a new play by Paul Weitz. (Reviewed in this issue.) (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME
Primary Stages presents two short new plays by Terrence McNally, starring Richard Thomas and Isabella Rossellini. (Reviewed in this issue.) (59E59 Theatre, 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SUITCASE; OR, THOSE THAT RESEMBLE FLIES FROM A DISTANCE
Louisa Thompson's cunningly constructed set holds two study lofts that rise above the stage, each containing a procrastinating, self-pitying female grad student. As the two women chat with each other on the phone, their boyfriends sulk on the stage below, trying in vain to gain access to their apartments and to their hearts. Why they would want in is unclear. Melissa James Gibson's script is often witty, and Colleen Werthmann and Christina Kirk, as the grad students, are sharp comic presences, but the scenario is more frustrating than funny. Directed by Daniel Aukin. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 28.)

"Roulette," a dark comedy by Paul Weitz, at the John Houseman.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

THEY WROTE THAT?
For forty years, the married New York songwriters Barry Mann (the composer) and Cynthia Weil (the lyricist) have written hit after hit: "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'," "On Broadway," "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," "Sometimes When We Touch," etc. In this show, Mann plays the piano and sings while Weil narrates the story of their career and their marriage. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

VALHALLA
Paul Rudnick's comic drama juxtaposes the lives of King Ludwig II of Bavaria (the charismatic Peter Frechette), who neglects his royal duties to indulge his passions for opera, sex, and architecture, and James Avery (Sean Dugan), a teen-ager in Texas in the nineteen-forties who would rather go to bed with his friend Henry Lee Stafford (Scott Barrow) than play football or get married. The two characters pursue their fantasies exuberantly in the first act, then run afoul of the dark forces of convention in the second. Directed by Christopher Ashley. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO PLAYING

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

THE BOY FROM OZ
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

GOLDA'S BALCONY
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

GOLF: THE MUSICAL
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

I AM MY OWN WIFE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

KING COWBOY RUFUS RULES THE UNIVERSE!
St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-533-4650.

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MERCURY: THE AFTERLIFE AND TIMES OF A ROCK GOD
Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-352-3101.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW
Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Feb. 29.)

WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

WONDERFUL TOWN
Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The winter season concludes with a week of performances of Peter Martins's two-act version of "The Sleeping Beauty." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Feb. 24 at 7:30, Feb. 25-27 at 8, Feb. 28 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 29 at 3.)

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
In his autobiography, Taylor traces the genesis of his dance "Last Look" to childhood games with marionettes. This season, he presents a work more clearly related to that early experience: "Le Grand Puppetier," which uses Stravinsky's score for "Petrushka" with a new libretto. A sorcerer tries to force his reluctant daughter to marry a limp-wristed (literally) courtier; a rebellion incited by the sorcerer's puppet brings about a comic ending, with everyone paired off happily. But a last-second reversal suggests that Taylor's sympathies lie with the man who pulls the strings. The season includes the New York première of "In the Beginning" (set in the Garden of Eden) and the haunting, tender repertory piece "Sunset," from 1983. March 2 at 7: "Aureole," "3 Epitaphs," "Le Grand Puppetier," and "Promethean Fire." Through March 14. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

"THE 92ND STREET Y HARKNESS DANCE PROJECT"
The series begins its tenth-anniversary season with the latest installment of "From the Horse's Mouth," an ongoing oral history that brings together dancers and dance-world figures who range in age from their mid-twenties to their eighties. The cast varies each night, but the format remains the same: each

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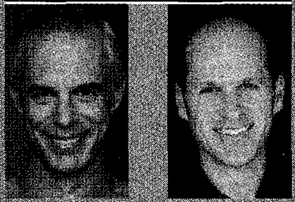

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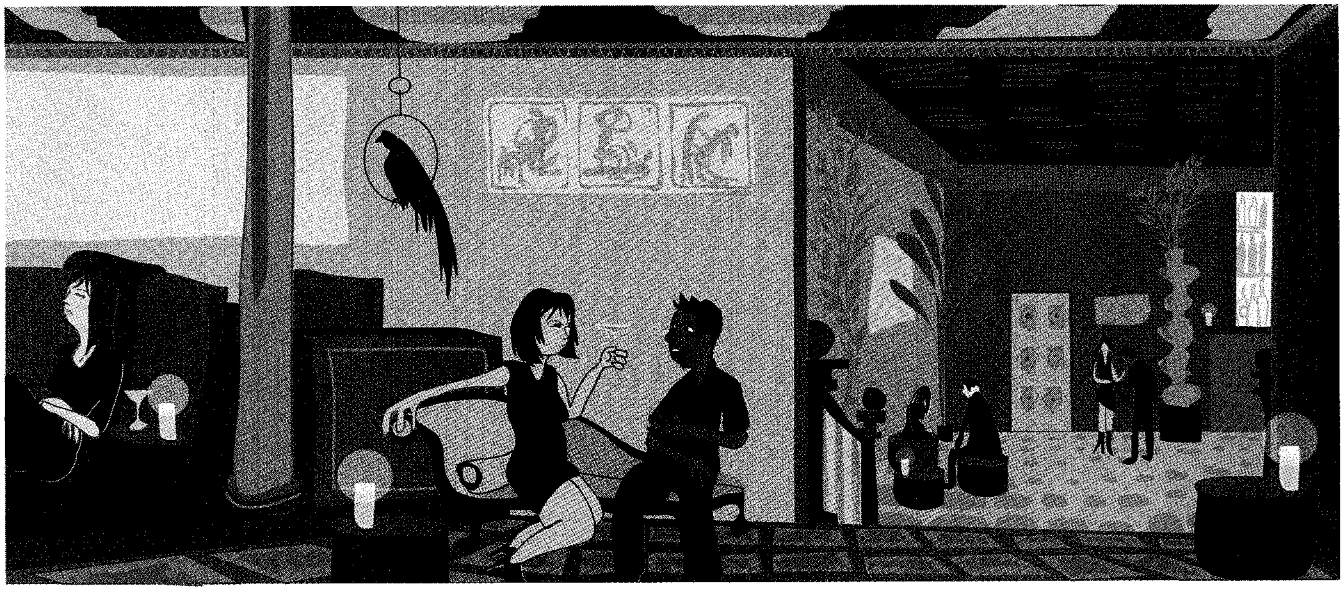
performer speaks for two minutes or less while three others interact in a structured improvisation. Though the spoken presentations this time around center on memories of the Y and tend to be overly nostalgic—even treacly—the improvisations are charming, and demonstrate coöperation across generations and genres. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Feb. 25-26 and Feb. 28 at 8 and Feb. 29 at 2 and 7.)

COMPAÑÍA MARIA PAGÉS
The acclaimed Spanish company makes its Joyce début with "Flamenco Republic," a traditional piece, and "El Perro Andaluz: Burlerías," which infuses flamenco with Surrealist allusions. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 24-27 at 8, Feb. 28 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 29 at 2 and 7:30.)

DANCE THEATRE WORKSHOP
David Zambrano, Anja Hitzenberger, and Edward Ratliff join the "Carnival" series with "Barcelona in 48 Hours," a multimedia work that blends dance (by Zambrano and Mat Voorter) with a pulsing live score by Ratliff and a film by Hitzenberger and Ratliff showing Zambrano and Voorter at large in Barcelona. The week also includes Susan Rethorst's "Oh Oh Oh," an evening of new and repertory work. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. "Barcelona": Feb. 25-26 at 7. Through March 6. "Oh Oh Oh": Feb. 27-28 at 7.)

ARMITAGE GONE! DANCE
Karole Armitage, who formed a company with this name in New York in 1979, has been working abroad for years, directing MaggioDanza in Florence and making ballets for European companies. She returns to New York with a multifaceted work that shows off the technique of her dancers, who excel at intricate, strenuous partnering. Contrary to its stiff title, "Time Is the Echo of an Axe Within a Wood" (from a Larkin poem), the work is fluid, incorporating popular dance forms. In the program's first half, dancers slide through a curtain of lights and reflective beads (made by David Salle), accompanied by Bartók's plucked string music and Gavin Bryars's shimmering chimes. In the second half, an expert in bharata natyam and two voguers add energy and surprise. The company includes the excellent Megumi Eda, a paper-thin, catlike Japanese dancer, and Theresa Ruth Howard, an Amazon from Philadelphia. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 2 at 8. Through March 7.)



Patrons of the K lounge sip Jaipur Moons and other special cocktails amid subcontinental surroundings.

MAXIMILIAN BODE

"GOODBYE TO OLD THINGS: SOLOS FOR SUPERHEROINES"
The popular downtown dancers Sarah Michelson, Ann Liv Young, Paige Martin, and Juliette Mapp make brief appearances in a dance-theatre piece conceived and choreographed by Jennifer Allen for the "City/Dans" series. (Danspace at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Feb. 26-28 at 8:30 and Feb. 29 at 7:30.)

"CINDERELLA"
New York Theatre Ballet's family-friendly production of the romantic ballet, choreographed by Donald Mahler. A gala fund-raiser takes place on Feb. 29 at 3:30. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Feb. 28 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through March 7.)

"IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY"
Montreal's Cas Public company comes to the New Victory with a suite of six tableaux about childhood fears, intended for both adult and young audiences. Choreographed by Hélène Blackburn. (209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Feb. 27 at 7, Feb. 28 at 2 and 7, and Feb. 29 at noon and 5. Through March 7.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

TIBET HOUSE BENEFIT CONCERT
Philip Glass, Ray Davies, David Byrne, Bright Eyes, Yo La Tengo, Keb' Mo', and others. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 25 at 7:30.)

DAVID KRAKAUER AND KLEZMER MADNESS!
Krakauer can play just about anything on the clarinet, from free jazz to contemporary classical, but set him and his band loose on klezmer and he really goes to town. The pianist **Uri Caine** joins him here. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 25 at 7:30.)

ROD STEWART
Despite being passed over by the Grammy Awards yet again ("As Time Goes By . . . the Great American Songbook: Volume II" earned him his thirteenth nomination), the classic-rock elder statesman and zealous soccer enthusiast continues to be footloose and fancy free. (Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. Feb. 25-26 at 8.)

ELVIS COSTELLO AND STEVE NIEVE
In 1993, when Costello unveiled his album of chamber music with the Brodsky Quartet, "The Juliet Letters," his fans, accustomed to sardonic guitar-based rock, were unmoved. But Costello continued to explore the world outside of rock and roll (he worked with Burt Bacharach in 1998), and he returned to chamber pop on his latest album, "North." His longtime keyboardist Nieve, as well as the Brodsky Quartet, also appears. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. Feb. 26 at 8.)

EVANESCENCE
Fronted by a black-clad singer, Amy Lee, this Arkansas export recently scored a major hit with the single "Bring Me to Life." The founding guitarist, Ben Moody, has departed, but the band's mix of thuggish guitars and ethereal warbling should be intact. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. Feb. 27 at 7:30.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The institute's annual flamenco festival concludes with a performance by the noted Spanish guitarist Paco De Lucia. (Beacon Theatre. For more information, call 212-545-7536. Feb. 27 at 8.)

GENO DELAFOSE
The son of the legendary accordionist John Delafose stops by with his French Rockin' Boogie Band. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. Feb. 29 at 7:30.)

HIP JAZZ CONCERT SERIES
The **Ray Charles** show, complete with sassy backup singers (the Raelettes) and a band of road-warrior veterans, is as blissfully old school as you can get. With the funky bop of **Lou Donaldson.** (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 2 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Feb. 25: The country singer **Brad Paisley.** Feb. 27: The R. & B. vocal group the **Manhattans** celebrates its fortieth anniversary. March 1: **Ian Hunter,** who was the charismatic lead singer of the great seventies glam rockers Mott the Hoople, and his Rant Band.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 25: The **Von Bondies** (momentarily infamous because the lead singer, Jason Stollsteimer, got into fisticuffs with Jack White, of their fellow Detroit garage-rockers the White Stripes) have just completed a new album, "Pawn Shoppe Heart," which was produced by the former Talking Heads keyboardist Jerry Harrison. Feb. 27-28: Music for America, a nonprofit group that wants to get young people to vote, has what should be a successful strategy: throwing parties. The first night belongs to the sharp Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk of **Soulive.** The industrious acid-jazz hipsters **Medeski, Martin & Wood** take over the following evening.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—The harmonica master **Charlie Musselwhite** has appeared with everyone from Tom Waits to the Cuban

singer Eliades Ochoa. In recent years, his singing and guitar playing have grown as assured as his harmonica work. On Feb. 25, Musselwhite, who just turned sixty, previews his forthcoming album, "Sanctuary," a gritty collection of covers and originals. His band here includes the noted Texan guitarist Charlie Sexton, who recently played behind Bob Dylan. Feb. 26: Grownup piano-driven pop from **Casey Stratton,** a classically trained young man whose girlish voice (think Tori Amos) conveys worldly emotion. Feb. 27: **The Soul of John Black** (see This Week). March 2-3: **Moya Brennan,** best known as the voice of the Irish group Clannad (she's also Enya's sister), offers songs from "Two Horizons," her first solo album in five years.

K

30 W. 52nd St. (212-265-6665)—This second-story midtown lounge has the feel of a swank Bombay hotel (it's located above an Indian restaurant, and the halls smell of exotic spices). Potted palms, plush divans, and gilded chairs are spread about a red carpet. A glowing diorama of the lake city Udaipur dominates one side of the establishment, and sexually explicit wall carvings can be found throughout. The house drinks are sweet and potent. In the back room, which is full of throw pillows, a large-screen television shows black-and-white Indian musicals from the twenties, but the couples lounging about tend to ignore it, turning to each other for entertainment.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Feb. 27: **Head of Femur,** a sprawling ensemble featuring members of Bright Eyes.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Feb. 27: **Cordero.** This local band full of indie-rock veterans sings in English and Spanish (its new album is titled "Somos Cordero"), and its music has an edgy, Southwestern feel.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Feb. 26: Thickets of blues-based improvisational rock, courtesy of the guitarist **Marc Ribot,** the bassist **Jamaaladeen Tacuma,** and the drummer **Calvin Weston.** Feb. 27: Music for America (see the Bowery Ballroom) presents the rapper **GZA.** Feb. 29: **Head of Femur** (see the Knitting Factory).

SATALLA

37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Feb. 27: **Hazmat Modine** explores a broad range of mostly American twentieth-century music, relying on the call and response of a tuba-and-harmonica front line. Feb. 29: **Huun-Huur-Tu,** Tuvan throat singers.

SIN-É

150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—Feb. 25: The duo **Misty Roses** aspires to easy-listening music for the downtown set. Feb. 28: New York's **Skeleton Key** pairs the junkyard aesthetic of Tom Waits' more eccentric work with surges of clanging punk-rock guitars and pounding, jittery rhythms.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through March 13: **Tierney Sutton.** Any contemporary singer who evokes Frank Sinatra is courting danger, but on Sutton's new album, "Dancing in the Dark," she finds her own way into the Master's material.

BARBÈS

376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Feb. 26-27: Two nights of expansive improvisation, with the tenor saxophonist **Tony Malaby,** the drummer **Tom Rainey,** and the pianist **Angelica Sanchez.**

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Feb. 29: The **Michel Camilo** trio. It doesn't take much to get the pianist Camilo to turn on the heat; leading him to a stage will just about do it. His expansive technique, modern-jazz sensibilities, and Latin leanings recently brought him a Grammy Award.

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Feb. 28, **Christine Andreas,** who possesses what a whole lot of cabaret singers would kill for: a fabulous voice. She also has style, theatrical flair, and charisma.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through March 6: **Christine Ebersole,** who won a Tony for her work in "42nd Street," gets support from the pianist **Billy Stritch,** best known for his musical association with Liza Minnelli.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Feb. 29: Dexter Gordon, who died in 1990, put bebop into the tenor saxophone in the forties, and then went on to perfect the style over the ensuing decades. He would have been eighty-one this year. The classic saxophonists **Jimmy Heath** and **Frank Wess,** along with two Gordon veterans, the pianist **Ronnie Matthews** and the bassist **Rufus Reid,** salute him. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

LE JAZZ AU BAR

41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Through Feb. 27: The pianist **Eddie Palmieri,** one of the founding fathers of modern Latin music, is joined by the lyrical saxophonist **David Sanchez.**

POP NOTES

SWEET AND SOUR

"Feels Like Home" (Blue Note), Norah Jones's second studio album, has pleasant midtempo melodies and forgivably generic lyrics, tasteful small-band arrangements anchored by a restrained piano, and smoky, sweet, elegant vocals that are pretty without being too beautiful—everything, that is, that sent Jones's star into ascent the first time around. "Feels Like Home" is being pushed as an uptempo move (because of a few electric guitars) or a roots move (because of covers of Townes Van Zandt and Tom Waits and a duet with Dolly Parton), but it's neither. Like "Come Away with Me," it's a mood move, and the mood is one of intimacy without edges. Sometimes, Jones does more with less—the loping opener, "Sunrise," has a sexy lyric in which a bedside alarm clock perpetually reads 9:15 (think legs instead of hands). Sometimes, she does less with less—"Those Sweet Words," about a balloon, is as airy as one. Neither a redefinition nor a falling off, "Feels Like Home" is something of a tautology: it proves that the most appealing thing about Jones is her appeal.

And what, exactly, is the appeal of Courtney Love at this late date? Her caricature of herself gets broader by the minute. **"America's Sweetheart"** (Virgin), Love's solo début, opens with the roaring "Mono," which suggests that a shallow Hole impression is better than none at all, and then takes a friendly swipe at Young Turks such as the Strokes with "But Julian, I'm a Little Bit Older Than You." After that, though, the album settles into a predictable mix of calculated audacity and equally calculated sentimentality. Love's frayed vocals may be the result of years of substance abuse, or they may simply be a pose: she has always been as much an actress as a singer. And, while it's hard to dislike a record loose enough to include the droll, dumb "The Zeplin Song" (choice rhyme: "minimum wage / Jimmy Page") and the aptly named "Uncool" (a clunky but affecting power ballad, co-written with Bernie Taupin, that winkingly recalls Gary Wright's "Dream Weaver"), it's hard to like a record whose only effect seems to be the preservation of Love's waning stardom.

—Ben Greenman

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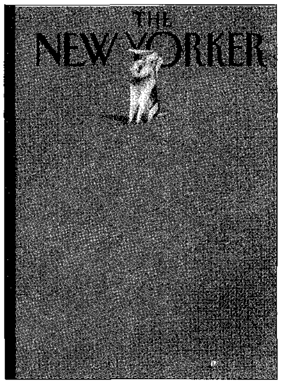

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JAZZ GALLERY

290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Feb. 26: **Sam Newsome and Global Unity.** A hard-bopping tenor saxophonist who was best known for his stint in Terence Blanchard's band, Newsome began concentrating solely on the soprano saxophone a few years ago, infusing it with a world-music sensibility. Mainstream jazz's loss is eclecticism's gain.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Feb. 26-29: **Jimmy Cobb's Mob.** The leader, the only surviving member of the recording band behind Miles Davis's eternally popular album "Kind of Blue," is a self-effacing drummer who incarnates swing. He's joined by a host of eager young players well versed in neo-hard bop.

The Von Bondies, at the Bowery Ballroom (see Night Life—Clubs).

CHRISTOPHER NEAL

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 29: The **Blue Orchid Dance Orchestra,** led by the trombonist Michael Arenella and featuring the vocalist Bliss Blood (of the Moonlighters), is an eleven-piece ensemble bent on turning the clock back to the roaring twenties.

SWEET RHYTHM

88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Feb. 27-28: The **Oliver Lake Steel Quartet.** The saxophonist Lake, a mainstay of the World Saxophone Quartet, has always had a taste for the tropics. (Witness the reggae-jazz hybrid of his Jump Up! ensemble.) This Caribbean-infused band incorporates the steel drum as a lead instrumental voice.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Feb. 29: **Barry Harris** may be a second-generation bebopper, but he's still closer to the source than nearly any other working pianist around. He knows the language of Parker, Powell, and Monk so well that he never has to flaunt his mastery. His fluency and ease quietly announce that he's the genuine article. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The name Chuck Close instantly conjures images of giant gridded portraits, tight and deadpan in Photo-Realist black-and-white in the seventies, with more recent versions dissolving in loose lozenges of color. **"Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration"** shows that all the portraiture of self and others went along with constant experiments in the practice of printmaking. Etching, silk screen, linoleum and woodblock prints, and hand-constructed pulp-paper multiples are tracked through various proof states, and actual woodblocks, etched copper panels, and other studio paraphernalia also appear. The show is as much a primer in the printmaker's art as it is a retrospective of Close faces. Through April 18. ♦ The first coffeehouse in England opened at Oxford in 1650; J. S. Bach wrote his "Coffee Cantata" in 1734. As a fad for hot and stimulating drinks swept Europe, designers adapted Asian and Turkish bowls, pots, and cups to create tea, coffee, and chocolate services in Sèvres porcelain or German silver, along with mahogany serving tables and golden samovars. The European housewares in the show **"Chocolate, Coffee, Tea"** are juxtaposed with a single example from the New World: a Mayan chocolate cup, circa 750 A.D., decorated with the image of a priest and an offertory platter of tamales. Through July 11. ♦ Satyrs, nymphs, muses, and demigods in attitudes of pastoral abandon populate **"Poets, Lovers, and Heroes in Italian Mythological Prints,"** a survey of classical scenes dating from the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. A chunky Pegasus smiles at a boyish Apollo beside a sacred stream; a square-jawed Ganymede is lifted into the air by a hulking Jovian eagle. Images by Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo stand out among the Salvator Rosas and Carraccis. The Tiepolos spent time in Spain, and one can see how their cool, simple lines influenced Goya. Through May 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)

33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Kiki Smith: Prints, Books & Things"** shows off a compendium of the artist's favored images: eyes, breasts, birds, babies, cats, Little Red Riding Hood, and the starry sky. Although she's primarily a sculptor, this retrospective of works on paper and fabric makes it clear that her three-dimensional thinking is deeply influenced by the etchings, artist's books, and even Xeroxes collected here. The range of works is impressive, from Smith's first experiments with silk screen in the eighties to the beautiful "Blue Feet," a series of drypoints and etchings made last year, and they reveal a side of her that's quick, funny, luscious, and fragile. Through March 8. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Umberto Boccioni joined the Milanese Futurists in 1909, but it was not until 1911, after a trip to Paris, that his festive genre and figure studies—especially portraits of his formidable, white-haired mother, his favorite subject—evolved into the dynamic "force-lines" of Futurism. **"Boccioni's Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece and the Avant-Garde in Milan and Paris"** examines the transformations of these crucial years, culminating in the creation of the huge portrait of his mother as a modern saint. Along the way, the show examines works by Picasso, Braque, Duchamp, and Medardo Rosso, with Boccioni's own famous bronze "Unique Forms of Continuity in Space" thrown in as a glowing footnote. Through May 9. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—The Bay Area painter Jay De Feo (1929-89) is best known for her magnum opus, "The Rose." It took her eight years (1958-66) to complete, and by the time it was extricated from her studio it weighed more than a ton. (The studio floor had grown so encrusted with paint that the artist Bruce Conner, who filmed the painting's removal, said that walking on it felt "like walking on the back of a whale.") "The Rose," with its radiant mass of silvery-white impasto, lies literally at the center of this small but potent show, **"Beside the Rose: Selected Works by Jay De Feo."** But the show opens with a more typical gesture: a seven-foot-long drawing of a ghostly pair of eyes. Puzzling vertical lines simultaneously fracture the image and heighten its oracular intensity—a struggle between obfuscation and revelation that's at the heart of De Feo's elusive art. Through Feb. 29. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—Parma, the birthplace of prosciutto, parmigiano reggiano, and the beleaguered Parmalat, also produced the artist Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola, better known as Parmigianino (1503-40). More than sixty of his works on loan from the Louvre, the British Museum, and Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum are on view in **"A Beautiful and Gracious Manner: The Art of Parmigianino."** The exquisite collection includes studies for his famed "Madonna of the Long Neck" (which never leaves the Uffizi in Florence), matchbook-size *primi pensieri,* or "first thought" sketches, and the painting (and preparatory drawing of) "Circumcision," a gift to the Medici-backed Pope Clement VII. The Mannerist master was also one of the first Italian artists to produce his own prints, a handful of which are also on view. Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Friday evenings until 9; and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Harlemworld: Metropolis as Metaphor"** feels at times like an urban-planning expo, but a few artists break out with fresh ruminations about the neighborhood as a cultural center, a tourist destination, and even a brand name. Coleman Austin Jordan's "Harlem Speak," a huge visitor-activated megaphone, pays homage to the tradition of soapbox orators. Darell Wayne Fields uses drawings, models, and photographs to create "House for Josephine Baker," and Nathaniel Belcher and Stephen Slaughter's film, "Harlem: The Ghetto Fabulous," rehearses the neighborhood's rich history through music and a montage of images, some found and some created digitally. Through April 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

BRIAN JUNGEN
Jungen is best known for tearing apart Nike Air Jordans and reassembling the pieces into Northwestern Native American-style masks. He has also built life-size whale skeletons from the curving frames of white plastic lawn chairs. For his New York début, he has made a basketball court from more than two hundred sewing-machine tables, their cutaway surfaces booby-trapping the court so that no one could go a step without crashing through. The piece is smart and good-looking, but viewers may wonder if Jungen is out of his element. Through March 14. (Triple Candie, 461 W. 126th St. 212-865-0783.)

DUNCAN HANNAH
Walter Sickert's Camden Town Group of post-Impressionists has been proposed as a stylistic influence on Hannah, but these paintings have more to do with Balthus or John Currin. Boys in short pants, ties, and jackets and prim-looking pinup girls are painted with misty pastel nostalgia; "The 39 Steps" features an English Art Deco theatre with the title of Hitchcock's classic film on its marquee; and "Maiden Voyage" looks like a faded postcard of the Queen Mary sailing past a swatch of sensible English countryside. Through March 6. (Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-535-5767.)

DAVID LEVINE
Those who know Levine only as a caricaturist (his work appears in the *New York Review of Books* and this magazine) may think they've stumbled into the wrong show—the larger room here is filled with watercolors and oils of Coney Island and Venice, vacation scenes populated by small colorfully dressed figures and large underdressed ones, like the heavyset woman curled up in the surf of "The Front." The downstairs gallery is devoted to Levine's drawings: Truman Capote as a lizard, his spotted tail just visible over his shoulder; Martha Stewart incubating a pile of golden eggs; Dick Cheney dandling George W. Bush on his knee. Through March 20. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-355-4545.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

BARRY FLANAGAN
This large show depends upon the equivocal charms of the British sculptor's leaping and dancing hares, which have colonized the world as public art. One bunny assumes the "Thinker" pose atop a computer; another jumps over the Empire State Building. The bronzes' soft, blackish patinas evoke Rodin. Are these works solemn whimsies or flip solemnities? They are only too glad to be what you like. Through March 13. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave. 212-563-4474.)

ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV
In one installation, an apple on the center of a table is surrounded by twenty place settings that suggest different methods for obtaining it. Strategies laid out in text and drawings range from sending a poodle to fetch the fruit to seducing the apple through Indian mystical energy. In a separate work, two uninhabited rooms from a children's hospital in Russia have been carefully re-created, continuing the Kabakovs' forays into spaces filled with absence. Through March 6. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

WILLIAM T. WILEY
Either the veteran Bay Area Funk artist and world-class punster, little seen here in recent decades, has got better or his absence has made New York hearts grow fonder. The sketchy paintings and drawings in "More Than Meats, the I" combine precise cartooning, skittery brushwork, and cabin-feverish rushes of words. Art politics and politics proper are on Wiley's contrary mind. "What side are you off of?" wonders one work. Another updates Paul Revere for our time of crisis: "One if they land, two if they see / To hell with the others I'm in it for me." Through March 6. (Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

AMAR KANWAR
The artist's thirty-minute film "A Season Outside," which was shot in India and Pakistan in 1997, contemplates the hostilities between the two nations. The opening sequence follows two cadres of border guards as they high-step through the nightly ritual of gate-closing and flag-folding. Kanwar's voice-over draws heavily on writings by Gandhi, and his tone of quiet elegy never simplifies or sentimentalizes. Through March 20. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

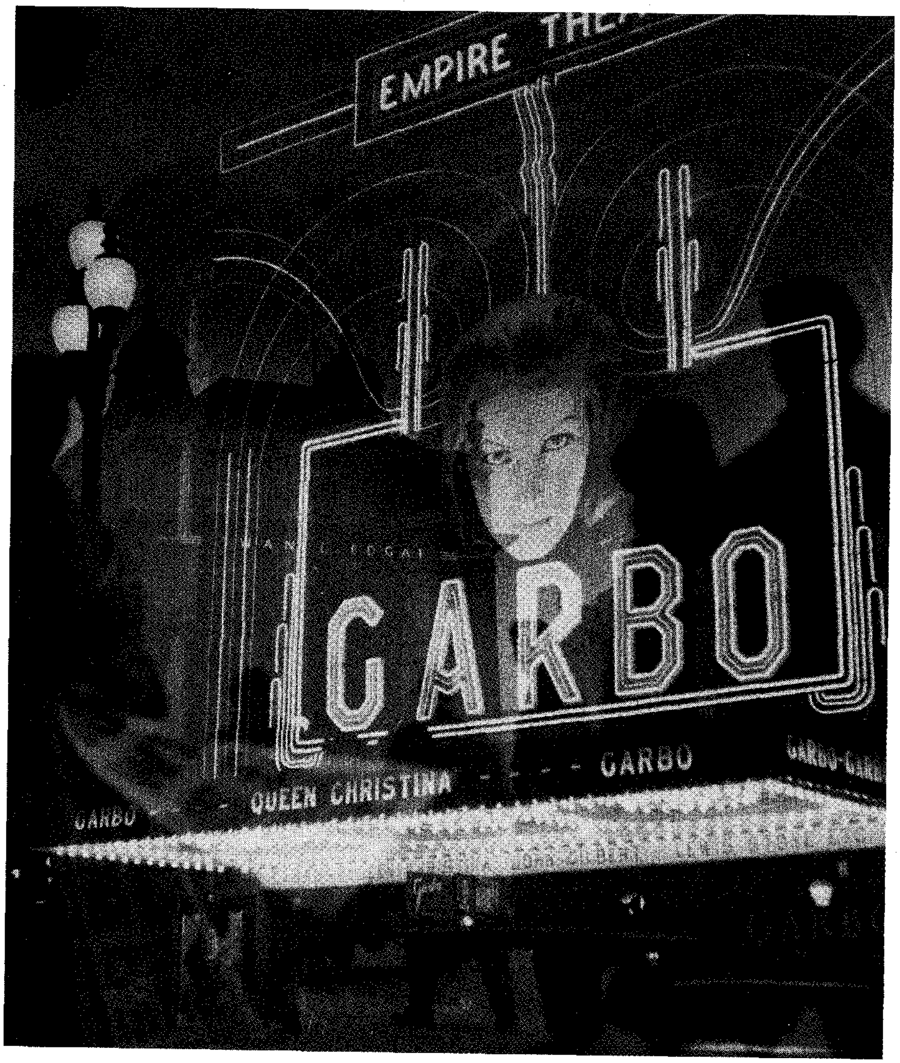
PETER SAUL
The satirist's new show of airbrushed paintings and comic-strip-like drawings, "Homage to Dali," is a tribute to Saul's forerunner in antic sleaze. "Still Life with Soft Watches," a considerable feat of viscous Cubism, heaps the timepieces together with kitchen utensils, wineglasses, vegetables, bits of 'toon figuration, and an airplane. Perhaps on Dali's behalf, Saul elsewhere subjects an image of Mondrian-style abstract painting to a gore-spurting assault with knives, nails, and an axe, as a tiny armchair (Matisse?), a stabbed can of peas (Warhol?), and a penny fly by. Through March 13. (Nolan/Eckman, 560 Broadway. 212-925-6190.)

JANE SOUTH
Rube Goldberg machines aren't usually gossamer-light and balanced, but South's improvisatory apparatuses are just that. The constructions, made of painted paper and sized somewhere between human and doll-house scale, mix an architect's precision with a mad inventor's extravagance. South emphasizes the fragility of the materials and plays flat elements like color and shadow off against sculptural depth. They feel like doodles, pushed into three dimensions and realized with comic mastery. Through March 3. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455.)

"SUBURBAN HOUSE KIT"
The architect Adam Kalkin reinvents the mail-order house made famous by Sears in the past century. Here it's modular and modern, constructed from recycled shipping containers and tricked out by artist-collaborators. Options include Tobias Rehberger's colored paper garden, a levitating Mylar backyard sculpture by Martin Kersels that recalls Andy Warhol's "Silver Clouds," Haim Steinbach's pantry display of miniature tubs and commodes, and Aernout Mik's video installation of people tearing things up in a workshop/storage room. You can order the whole package for $368,400. Through March 27. (Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

RICHARD CALDICOTT
Mark Rothko's color fields come immediately to mind on first viewing these photographs of what



"Untitled, 1934," by Jean Moral, at the Gitterman gallery's inaugural show, which is also the French modernist's American gallery début (see Photography).

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–The New York Times Book Review

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–Entertainment Weekly

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turn out to be Tupperware containers and lids. The mundane is monumentalized in forty-by-fifty-inch prints that Caldicott, a British artist, makes by overlapping pictures of Tupperware fragments, enlarging them, and somehow transforming the layers of plastic into mysterious, graphically formal, luminous images. Through Feb. 28. (Meyerowitz, 120 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-2770.)

LORETTA LUX
Lux, a German artist who lives in Ireland, makes portraits of children that are as lovely as they are unsettling. Color photographs of pale, huge-eyed, wistful kids are digitally wedded to hand-painted backgrounds of cloud-blushed skies and perfect gardens. There are none of the usual smirking allusions to incipient sexuality here. The chilly modesty and inertness of the images—reminiscent of Renaissance painting—provide the frisson. Through March 6. (Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

RAY K. METZGER
Black-and-white photographs taken at the beach in Atlantic City in the late nineteen-sixties and seventies by a photographer who studied with Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. All the pictures are self-consciously formal, but the most surprising ones are in a series of eight taken under the boardwalk. People carrying towels and beach chairs walk along a dark corridor lit by geometrically severe slashes of light coming through the wooden slats above them. Through March 20. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

JEAN MORAL
Vintage prints from the twenties and thirties by a French modernist who worked in Paris until the Second World War. Moral, who died in Switzerland in 1999, was published in *Vu*, *Vanity Fair*, and, especially, *Harper's Bazaar*, but his work hadn't been exhibited for fifty years when a museum show was organized in France in 1999. The Parisian street scenes and Surrealist photograms recall the work of his contemporaries André Kértesz and Man Ray. Through April 10. (Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

JEM SOUTHAM
Southam makes landscapes with a conceptual conceit. Three pairs of pictures taken in the British countryside—of a farmer's field, a seaside cliff, and a river estuary—show the same site at different times. A small, circular dew pond appears in the field; lichen grows on fallen boulders; the place where the river meets the sea is contorted. A poignant series of seven photographs documents a small rural property over a period of five years, as it shifts from brambly country house to graded, muddy field. Through March 20. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

KATHY SUDER
A series of color-saturated pictures of boxers that owe more to Caravaggio than to *Sports Illustrated*. In one image, a boxer is laid out, perhaps knocked out, and the referee lurks in the corner of the frame; the foreshortened perspective leaves the boxer headless, his feet scrambled and his gloves touching as if in prayer. The chiaroscuro effect of these pictures—nary a fan can be seen in the background—forces you to concentrate on the bodies in the ring. Through March 13. (Bruce Silverstein, 504 W. 22nd St. 212-627-3930.)

Short List

DIANE ARBUS
Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through March 27.

COLLIER SCHORR
303 Gallery, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Feb. 28.

"ONLY SKIN DEEP"
International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 212-857-0000. Through Feb. 29.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Feb. 25 at 10 A.M.: Billy Wilder was an avid collector of modern art, but in 1989 the director of "Some Like It Hot" found some of his Picassos, Schieles, and Klees too hot to handle, unloading them at auction for more than thirty million dollars. The first eleven lots of the upcoming Impressionist and modern art auction are works from Wilder's collection, all but one in the "primitif moderne" style; the exception, by the Surrealist Pierre Roy, is a haunting Vermeer-like interior with two Dadaist bowler hats. ♦ Feb. 26 at 2: In the first sale from the Spiro-family collection, which took place in London in December, an erotic letter written (while on the high seas) by Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton fetched more than a hundred thousand pounds. The second and last installment, held Stateside, is devoted to manuscripts and books by and relating to explorers and adventurers, especially the dashing T. E. Lawrence; it features rare editions of his books as well as letters to and from influential personalities such as Winston Churchill, who raves that "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" (Lawrence's tale of his Arabian exploits) "will live with 'Gulliver's Travels' and 'Robinson Crusoe.' " (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

DOYLE
Feb. 25-26 at 10 A.M.: "Belle Époque," an occasional sale of decorative art works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

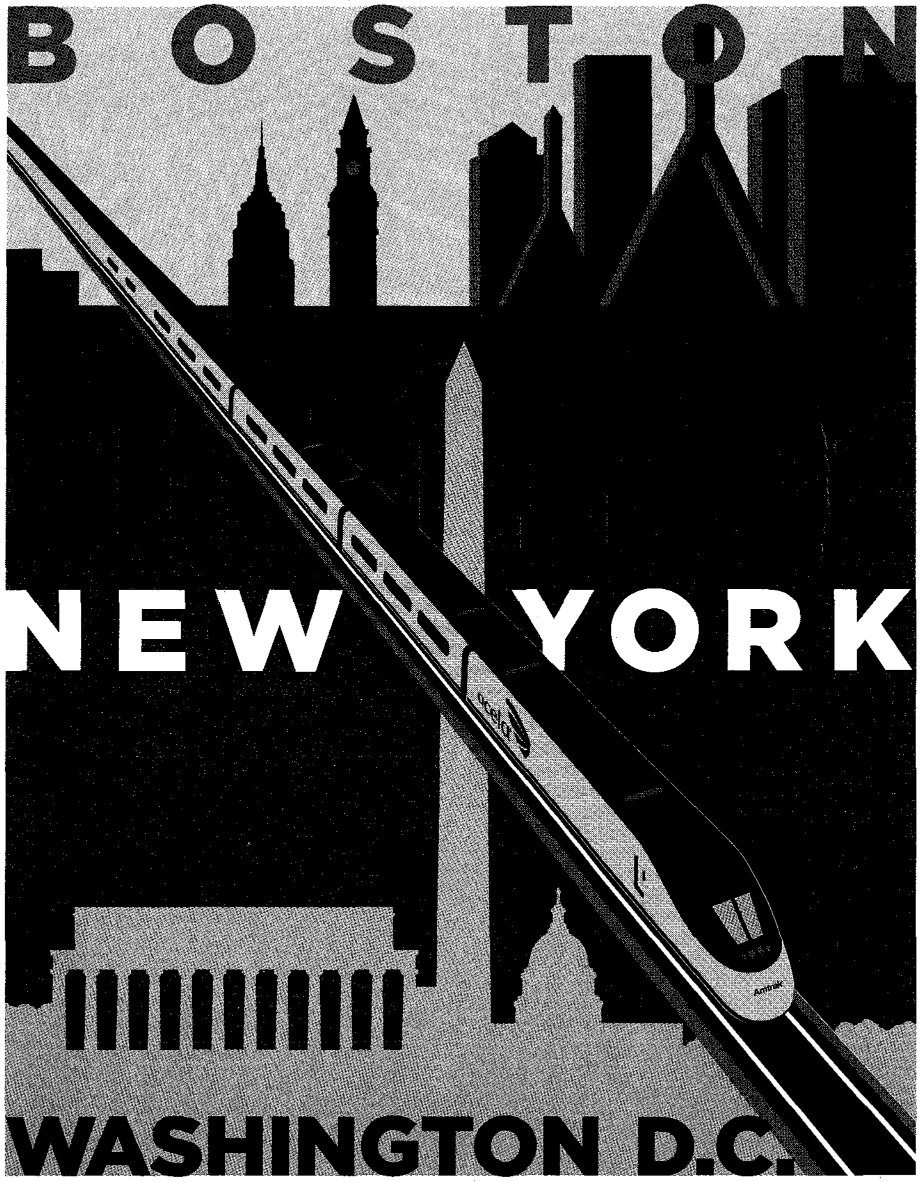
SWANN
Feb. 26 at 10:30 A.M.: In honor of Black History Month, the house offers a sale of printed and manuscript African-Americana distinguished by a number of precedents—the first handwritten scores by Duke Ellington ever to be offered at auction; a first edition of Phillis Wheatley's "Poems on Various Subjects" (1773), the first book of poems written by a black woman in America; and a first edition of the temptingly titled "What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking" (1881), the first cookbook published by an African-American. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

"WORKS ON PAPER"
The sixteenth installment of the annual fair features watercolors, fine prints, photography, drawings, posters, and illustrated books from nearly a hundred dealers in a half-dozen countries. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-777-5218. Feb. 26-29.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Met's revival of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's production of **"L'Italiana in Algeri"** is a thoroughly happy affair, featuring such excellent Rossinians as Olga Borodina, Juan Diego Flórez, Earle Patriarco, Ferruccio Furlanetto, and Lyubov Petrova; James Levine conducts. (Feb. 25 at 8 and Feb. 28 at 1:30.) ♦ Cynthia Lawrence takes the title role in a revival of **"Tosca,"** which also features Francisco Casanova and Samuel Ramey; John Fiore. (Feb. 26 at 8.) ♦ Tchaikovsky's gritty and melodramatic **"Queen of Spades"** may lack the emotional involvement of "Eugene Onegin" (another of his Pushkin operas), but it's still a fabulous vehicle for a first-rate cast—which the Met unstintingly provides in this revival of Elijah Moshinsky's luxurious but sharp-edged neo-traditionalist production from 1995. Plácido Domingo (who shares the stage with such artists as Adrianne Pieczonka, Elena Zaremba, Felicity Palmer, Nikolai Putilin, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky) may avoid the occasional high note, but his stage presence and vocal power remain undimmed; Vladimir Jurowski draws sinuous shapes and bold colors from a grateful Met orchestra. (Feb. 27 at 8.) ♦ Renée Fleming, Ramón Vargas, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky—a winning team—return to the leading roles of **"La Traviata,"** with Valery Gergiev taking the podium for a final run of performances that concludes next week. (Feb. 28 at 8 and March 2 at 7:30.) ♦ A new production of **"Don Giovanni,"** directed by Marthe Keller and featuring Anja Harteros, Christine Goerke, Hei-Kyung Hong, Thomas Hampson (in the title



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role), and René Pape; Levine conducts. (March 1 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ENCOMPASS NEW OPERA THEATRE / AFTER DINNER OPERA: "A PERFECT PLAN"
The distinguished American composer Seymour Barab, hoping to steal some fire from the embers of the Savoy Opera, has based his new two-act comic opera on a play by W. S. Gilbert. Nancy Rhodes's intrepid little company, in association with After Dinner Opera, presents it in the club-like atmosphere of the Thalia Theatre. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 26-27 at 8.)

AMATO OPERA
New York's beloved pocket opera company mounts a new production of Offenbach's **"Tales of Hoffmann,"** sung in French, at its cozy matchbox theatre in the East Village. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Feb. 28 at 7:30 and Feb. 29 at 2:30.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: "VOLPONE"
John Musto, one of the more ingratiating vocal composers on the contemporary scene, has been commissioned by Wolf Trap to write an opera based on Ben Jonson's sharp and timeless comedy. The Guggenheim Museum previews the mid-March première with an evening of excerpts from the work, which will also include a discussion with Musto and his librettist Mark Campbell, moderated by Jamie Bernstein Thomas. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Feb. 29 and March 1 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The flutist James Galway, who has taken John Corigliano's puckish "Pied Piper Fantasy" around the country, brings it home this week to the Philharmonic, the orchestra in which the composer's father served as concertmaster. Lorin Maazel concludes the program with "The Planets," by Holst, whose richly layered extraterrestrial evocations should be a match for the conductor's micromanagerial style. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Feb. 26 and March 2 at 7:30 and Feb. 27-28 at 8.)

"ALL THE POET CAN DO IS WARN"
War and remembrance are the themes for the Orchestra of St. Luke's concert at Carnegie Hall, which features a première from Aaron Jay Kernis ("Sarabanda in Memoriam"), readings from Auden, Heaney, and Virgil by the actor Sam Waterston, and a guest appearance by the violinist Vladimir Spivakov (performing Hartmann's "Concerto Funèbre"). Donald Runnicles, the conductor, also leads performances of Strauss's lushly elegiac "Metamorphosen" and Shostakovich's sardonic Symphony No. 9. (212-247-7800. Feb. 26 at 8.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA: "ORCHESTRA UNDERGROUND"
The A.C.O.'s much needed stylistic realignment, overseen by the conductor Steven Sloane and the composer Robert Beaser, continues apace at Zankel Hall with an evening of cutting-edge works. Lisa Bielawa's "The Right Weather" is a four-movement fantasy inspired by a verse from "Eugene Onegin" that brings a pianist (Andrew Armstrong) together with four radically diverse instrumental ensembles; Michael Gordon's "Gotham" is an expressionistic portrait of the city made in collaboration with three trusted colleagues, the filmmakers Bill Morrison and Laurie Olinder and the director Bob McGrath. (212-247-7800. Feb. 27 at 7:30.)

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Leonard Slatkin brings his orchestra to Carnegie Hall for two programs centered on Mahler's re-orchestrations of Beethoven's symphonies—a task that will need some explaining, which the conductor, a smart and genial lecturer, will be happy to provide. Feb. 27 at 8: The Ninth Symphony, performed with a vocal crew that includes the mezzo-soprano Jill Grove, the tenor Eric Cutler, and the Choral Arts Society of Washington. ♦ Feb. 28 at 8: The New York première of John Adams's "A Guide to Strange Places" is a prelude to the Symphony No. 3, "Eroica." (212-247-7800.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
James Judd leads the student ensemble in a program of Ravel, Schumann (the Symphony No. 3, "Rhenish"), and Dutilleux. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 27 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
"Don Quixote" will soon be four hundred years old, and the orchestra is celebrating by joining with the pianist Pedro Carboné in Falla's Piano Concerto and with the Compañía Tridente of Granada puppet troupe (in its American début) for a performance of "Master Peter's Puppet Show" (inspired by a scene from the novel). The concert also includes Quixotian works by such composers as Esplá and Gerhard. Ángel Gil-Ordóñez, the former associate conductor of the National Orchestra of Spain, conducts. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 28 at 8.)

TAFELMUSIK BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
Toronto's renowned early-music band comes to Queens College as part of a silver-anniversary tour. Jeanne Lamon, its leader since 1981, conducts the group in a program of Handel, Vivaldi, Telemann, and Bach (the Brandenburg Concerto No. 3). (LeFrak Concert Hall, Colden Center, Queens College. 718-793-8080. Feb. 29 at 2.)

TABLES FOR TWO

COUNTER
105 First Ave. (212-982-5870)—This is a meat-and-potatoes kind of joint, if by meat you mean "meat loaf"—portobello mushrooms ground up with almonds, macadamia nuts, and cashews in a porcini-mushroom-and-cabernet gravy—and by potatoes you mean cauliflower and pine nuts whipped into a fluffy cumulus and seasoned with parsley and a few shards of uncooked garlic. On Raw Tuesdays at this mostly organic vegetarian restaurant, the raw-foods chef Michele Thorne serves up these dishes with wines chosen by Donna Binder, one of the owners: biodynamic Muscadet, organic Zinfandel, and sustainable Riesling. (A quick gloss: biodynamic wines are not only organic, meaning no chemicals or pesticides, but are grown using what one employee called a "more holistic approach"—they might, for example, be harvested according to the cycles of the moon. Sustainable wines are produced organically but haven't been certified as such by the F.D.A.)

The regular menu, designed by Thorne and the executive chef, Eric Hunter, combines the raw and the cooked—Cape Cod cakes (crusty fried tofu and seaweed in tartar sauce), wasabi crêpes drowned in a tangerine sauce, a grilled vegetable salad covered in a nut crumble—and attracts a loyal crowd of long-haired sirens so eerily happy-looking and outgoing they might be mistaken for members of a West Coast religion. Which, in a way, they are. One recent evening, a man walked in and saw a pigtailed woman sitting alone on a red vinyl stool at the bar, chatting with the proprietor about organic-food distributors while jotting notes in a burlap-covered journal. She flashed him a euphoric smile. "They have the best food here!" she said. "Do you work here?" he asked. (She said she didn't.) He sat down next to her, but as she began to point out her favorites—maybe it was hiziki (a sea vegetable) or the rapini salad, bitter and gritty and garnished with peppery coils of parsnip—he realized what he'd got himself into. "No, no, it looks good. Really? Wow, that's amazing," he said effortfully as she explained the benefits of eating raw. But he stayed, even when she turned and flashed her smile at someone else. It's nice to think he might have topped off his dinner with the Banana Split Sundae. God knows what's in it, but it's icy, sweet, rich, and very satisfying. (Open daily for dinner and weekends for brunch. Entrées $10.95-$16.25.)

—*Dana Goodyear*

BOSTON PHILHARMONIC
This freelance ensemble was formed in 1979 expressly for the maverick conductor-educator Benjamin Zander, whose idiosyncratic performances of Mahler have an uncanny combination of fiery zeal and exquisite care. Zander's latest project, the "Resurrection" Symphony, will be performed by the soprano Ilana Davidson, the mezzo-soprano Susan Platts, and the Chorus Pro Musica. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 29 at 8.)

RECITALS

COMPOSERS CONCORDANCE: "WILD SIDE"
Rara Avis, a piano-sax-and-percussion trio headed by the composer Gordon Beeferman, leads off the new-music collective's twentieth-birthday concert, a tribute to composers who improvise. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. Feb. 25 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
Feb. 25 at 8: The guitarist Manuel Barreuco and the recorder player Michala Petri team up for music by Handel, Bach, Walton, Piazzolla, Roberto Sierra (a première), and Robert Beaser. ♦ Feb. 28 at 8: Schubert's music may be as Viennese as Sacher Torte, but, like so many inhabitants of that reluctantly cosmopolitan burg, the composer's roots lay elsewhere, in Moravia and Bohemia. The Tokyo String Quartet, making some connections, performs the String Quintet in C Major (with the cellist Timothy Eddy) along with Dvořák's Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major (with Jon Kimura Parker). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

BARGEMUSIC
Evgenia Rubinova, a recent silver medalist in the Leeds Piano Competition, begins the Barge's weekend concerts with an all-Rachmaninoff program (including the Second Sonata). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Feb. 26-27 at 7:30. For a complete schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

THE SALZBURG MARIONETTES
The Austrian troupe offers performances of operas (accompanied by famous recordings) using two-foot-tall puppets and richly detailed sets; they come to the Metropolitan Museum for a four-day residency that includes "The Barber of Seville," "Peter and the Wolf," and "The Magic Flute." (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Feb. 26-29. For details, see www.metmuseum.org.)

SEQUITUR: MUSIC BY GIACINTO SCELSI
Columbia University's Miller Theatre is the setting for a concert of the strange and richly spiritual works (including "Anahit") of the twentieth-century Italian master; the soprano Elizabeth Farnum and the clarinettist Michael Lowenstern are among the soloists. (See This Week.) (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 26 at 8.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
After a winter hiatus, the intimate chamber-music festival (held in a cottage on the grounds of a City Island bed-and-breakfast) returns with a new music director—the flutist Sato Moughalian—and a new sense of mission. Her first concert is a grand one: a celebration of Rossini's birthday that features the singing of two Metropolitan Opera soloists, Sandra Piques Eddy and Andrew Gangestad. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. Feb. 29 at 12:30. Tickets at the door.)

NATHAN GUNN
The dashing American baritone, accompanied by his wife, Julie Gunn, offers a garland of American songs (by Barber, Bolcom, Rorem, and Burke and Van Heusen) on the themes of childhood, love, and war. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Feb. 29 at 5.)

STORIONI TRIO AMSTERDAM
The up-and-coming ensemble performs piano trios by Schumann, Dvořák (the "Dumky"), and the Georgian composer Nodar Gabunia (a première). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 212-288-0700. Feb. 29 at 5.)

POMERIUM
Alexander Blachly conducts his superb chamber choir in music by Lassus, the latest offering in Cooper Union's impressively diverse series of concerts. (Great Hall, Third Ave. at 7th St. 212-279-4200. March 1 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"STEEL PAN REVOLUTION"
Nineteenth-century colonial authorities in Trinidad and Tobago banned drums for fear they'd be used to carry incendiary messages between islanders. Bamboo sticks, pots and pans, and the like were used instead, and in the nineteen-forties teen-agers in Trinidad hit upon the idea of playing fifty-five-gallon oil drums. On March 2 at 7, the Kitchen explores the steel-pan drum, with a night of poetry, dance, film, and music. The storytellers and poets RH Douglas, Lynne Procope, Cheryl Boyce Taylor, and Roger Bonair-Agard and the steel-pan player Patrick Davis will do the honors. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

READINGS
Feb. 26 at 7: Adam Haslett joins students from the Writer's Studio for an evening of fiction. (Village Community School, 272 W. 10th St. For more information, call 212-255-7075.) ♦ March 2 at 8: Roddy Doyle, Nick Hornby, Dave Eggers, and other writers gather for the benefit of 826 NYC, a new tutoring center for children run by the literary journal *McSweeney's*. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

TALKS
Feb. 25 at 6:30: The writers Norman Mailer and Pete Hamill join the actor Kevin McCarthy, the cultural historian Ann Douglas, and others for a centennial celebration of James T. Farrell, the author of the "Studs Lonigan" trilogy. (New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-930-0855.) ♦ March 1 at 7: Azar Nafisi, the author of "Reading Lolita in Tehran," talks about her work with the *Times* reporter Julie Salamon. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

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MOVIES OPENING

ALILA
Amos Gitai ("Kadosh") directed this ensemble drama about ten people who live in an apartment building in a poor area of Tel Aviv. In Hebrew. Opening Feb. 27. (Cinema Village.)

BROKEN LIZARD'S CLUB DREAD
The comedy troupe returns with its second feature, in which dead bodies start turning up in a tropical paradise presided over by an ex-rock star. Directed by Jay Chandrasekhar. Opening Feb. 27.

DIRTY DANCING: HAVANA NIGHTS
A retelling of the 1987 film, set in prerevolutionary Cuba. Diego Luna and Romola Garai play the star-crossed teen dance partners. Directed by Guy Ferland. Opening Feb. 27.

GOOD BYE, LENIN!
When his mother awakes from a coma, an East German man pretends that the Wall has not fallen and that Communism is still the rule of the land, in a comedy directed by Wolfgang Becker. In German. Opening Feb. 27.

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 25.

RISK/REWARD
A documentary that follows the lives of four women working on Wall Street in 2001. Directed by Elizabeth Holder and Xan Parker. Opening Feb. 27. (Pioneer Theatre.)

TWISTED
Ashley Judd plays a police detective who becomes a suspect in a serial-murder case when some of her former boyfriends turn up dead, in a thriller directed by Philip Kaufman. Opening Feb. 27.

FILM NOTES

ALONG CAME POLLY
Even by the standards of romantic comedy, the pairing of Ben Stiller and Jennifer Aniston feels like the product of an artificial intelligence. Stiller, employing his paranoid persona, plays a risk analyzer who sees E. coli in a bowl of bar nuts. Aniston, in a cautious performance, is a catering employee with commitment problems; we know she's a free spirit because she wears knit hats. Yet, despite the absence of chemistry, the two stars occasionally connect for a good gag, and the writer-director John Hamburg sets up some very funny moments, especially for the naturally squeamish. Hank Azaria, last seen as the editor Michael Kelly in "Shattered Glass," is unrecognizable as a nudist French scuba instructor, and Philip Seymour Hoffman does a good bit as a basketball spaz.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

BADLANDS
Probably we've all seen those convicted killers in prison documentaries on TV who sound uninvolved and mechanical when they talk about their crimes; Terrence Malick's 1973 début picture extends that uninvolvement to the whole culture. Set at the end of the fifties, it's about an emotionless young killer (Martin Sheen) and his fifteen-year-old girlfriend (Sissy Spacek), whose killing spree starts in South Dakota. The young lovers are psychologically aberrant and yet just like everybody else; their moral vacuum spreads over the flat, dead landscape. Malick appears to be saying that mass-culture banality is killing our souls and making everybody affectless, but his detached tone puts the viewer in the ugly position of feeling culturally superior to the people on the screen. An intellectualized movie—shrewd and artful, carefully styled to sustain its low-key view of dissociation—but so preconceived that there's nothing left to respond to.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Feb. 27.)

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS
Like "Potemkin," this film, originally released in 1965, is an epic in the form of a "created documentary"; it's a reconstruction of the events of 1954 to 1957 in the guerrilla war waged by the National Liberation Front against the French authorities, with the oppressed, angry masses as the hero. The enemy of the Algerian N.L.F.—the hyper-intelligent French colonel played by Jean Martin—isn't really a character; he represents the cool, inhuman manipulative power of imperialism versus the animal heat of the multitudes rushing toward us as they rise against their oppressors. The director, Gillo Pontecorvo, and his co-writer, Franco Solinas, are almost too clever in their use of this device of the colonel—yet it works, and brilliantly. The revolutionaries forming their pyramid of cells don't need to express revolutionary consciousness, because the French colonel is given such a full counter-revolutionary consciousness that he says it all for them. He even expresses the knowledge that history is on the side of the oppressed colonial peoples, who will win; he himself is merely part of a holding action, preserving imperialism a little longer but bound to fail. The movie has a firebrand's fervor; it carries you with it, and doesn't give you time to think. In French and Arabic.—*P.K.* (Film Forum.)

CITY OF GOD
Just how far into your face can a movie get? This one has every intention of leaving you scalded and bruised. Set in Rio de Janeiro, it was directed by Fernando Meirelles, who tries every trick known to cameramen: freeze frames, whip pans, multiple dissolves, slow motion, double motion, any kind of motion. The object is to keep pace with his characters, the young and dispossessed of the Brazilian slums. The movie hastens roughly from the nineteen-sixties to the eighties, as we watch the boys either die or grow old before their time. The result is a jolting ride, but such is the skill on show that we run the risk of being too exhilarated to notice every death; does the film convince in its plea for the forgotten poor, or are we encouraged to forget them as they fall? In Portuguese.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/20/03.) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema 2, Empire 25, and Lincoln Square.)

THE COOLER
This tough and sentimental genre film feels like a B movie from 1956 with a dirty mouth. Bernie Lootz (William H. Macy) has such terrible luck that a Vegas casino owner named Shelly (Alec Baldwin) uses him as a "cooler": no sooner does Bernie join a crap game than anyone with a hot hand immediately begins to lose. But then Bernie falls in love with a young cocktail waitress, Natalie (Maria Bello), and his magic suddenly shifts: now everyone around him wins, which is big trouble for Bernie. The writer-director Wayne Kramer keeps the color scheme of this Runyonesque fable harsh and bright—the night tones of Vegas, seen from its underside. The movie is set in sordid casinos and the kind of green-walled motel room in which fornication takes place in the adjoining room at a colossal volume. The crud and the petty desperation of "The Cooler" are immensely enjoyable as atmosphere, and the actors attack their roles with relish.—*David Denby* (1/12/04) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

DEAD END
The setting of Sidney Kingsley's once celebrated play is a dead-end street on the East River, where an expensive apartment house towers over the slums; the play is about the confrontations of rich and poor, and it features a gang of streetwise kids and a gangster, bred there, who comes back for a visit. (When the film was released in 1937, it was advertised as "Dead End, Cradle of Crime.") The movie has the ambience of Broadway social conscious-

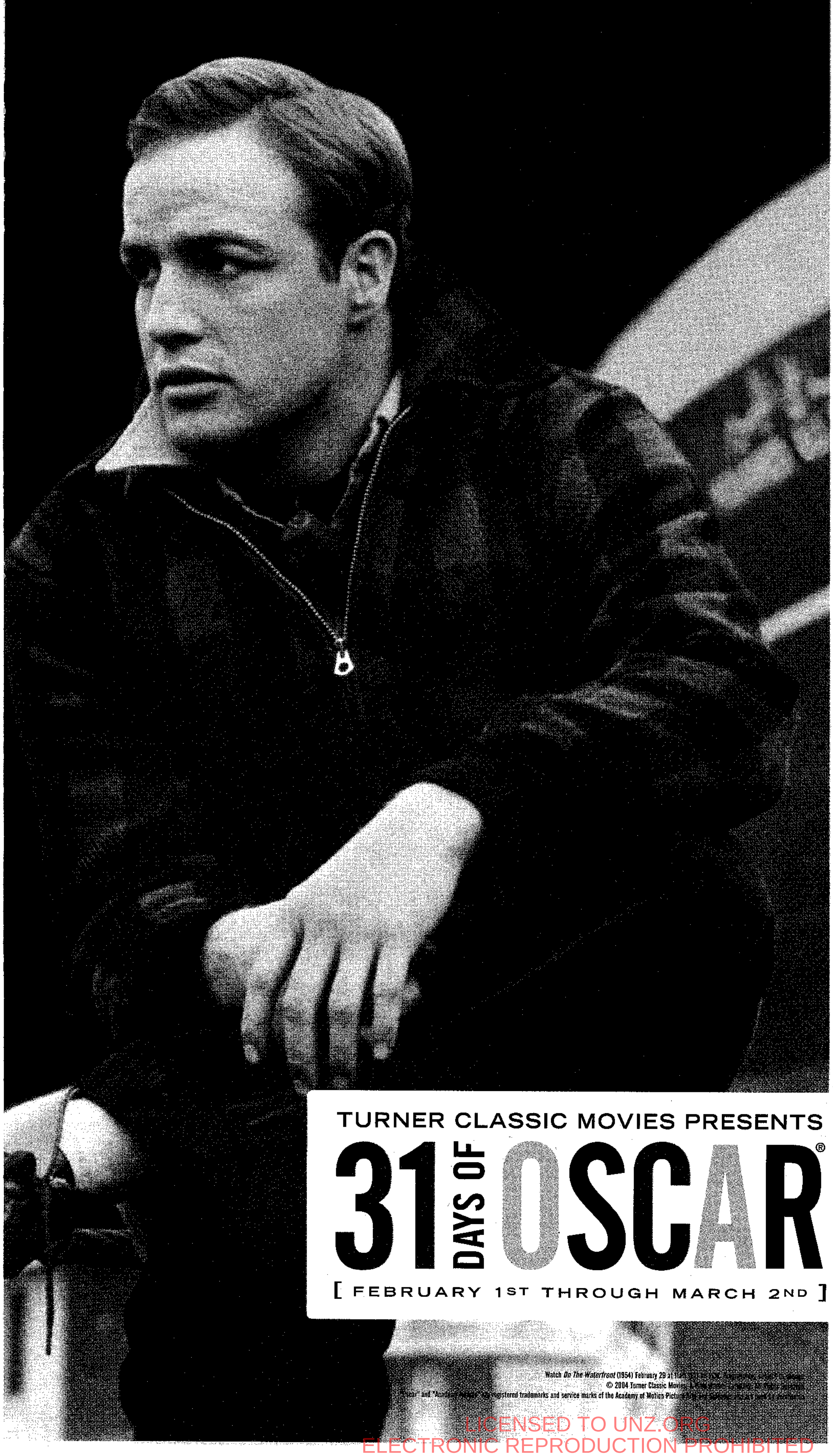
Gahan Wilson

At BAM, Michael Reeves' "The Sorcerers" and other British horror films.

GAHAN WILSON

JUST THE CONTENDERS,

NOT THE PRETENDERS.



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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26

8:00 PM	Ben-Hur ('59)
12:00 AM	Lawrence of Arabia ('62)
4:00 AM	Midnight Cowboy ('69)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

6:00 AM	The Broadway Melody ('29)
8:00 AM	The Life of Emile Zola ('37)
10:00 AM	Around the World in 80 Days ('56)
1:00 PM	The Apartment ('60)
3:30 PM	Marty ('55)
5:30 PM	Oliver! ('68)
8:00 PM	From Here to Eternity ('53)
10:00 PM	West Side Story ('61)
1:00 AM	Annie Hall ('77)
3:00 AM	The Last Emperor ('87)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28

6:00 AM	Gigi ('58)
8:00 AM	An American in Paris ('51)
10:00 AM	The Best Years of Our Lives ('46)
1:00 PM	It Happened One Night ('34)
3:00 PM	You Can't Take it With You ('38)
5:30 PM	Rebecca ('40)
8:00 PM	Driving Miss Daisy ('89)
10:00 PM	Kramer vs. Kramer ('79)
12:00 AM	Rain Man ('88)
2:15 AM	Mrs. Miniver ('42)
4:30 AM	Grand Hotel ('32)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 29

6:30 AM	Cimarron ('31)
8:45 AM	Chariots of Fire ('81)
11:00 AM	On the Waterfront ('54)
1:00 PM	In the Heat of the Night ('67)
3:00 PM	The Bridge on the River Kwai ('57)
5:45 PM	Rocky ('76)

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ness of the thirties, which, like the beautifully engineered plot, is highly entertaining. Humphrey Bogart is the gangster—Baby Face Martin—with Allen Jenkins as his sidekick, Claire Trevor as his old girlfriend who has turned whore, and Marjorie Main (before her Ma Kettle days) as his mother. And the thieves who steal the picture are the Dead End Kids: Gabriel Dell, Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall, Billy Halop, Bobby Jordan, and Bernard Punsley. Directed by William Wyler; cinematography by Gregg Toland; screenplay by Lillian Hellman.—*P.K.* (Gramercy Theatre; Feb. 28-29.)

THE DREAMERS

An American college student named Matthew (Michael Pitt) is in Paris in 1968 and soaking up as many movies as he can. When the government cracks down on the state-sponsored Cinémathèque Française, he gets caught up in the demonstrations and meets a red-bereted beauty named Isabelle (Eva Green) and her twin brother, Théo (Louis Garrel), who has the looks of a debauched medieval priest. The director, Bernardo Bertolucci, loves to create a hothouse. In "Last Tango in Paris," he used enclosed space to explore the limits of romantic desire, but here the conceit is a different kind of exuberance: cinephilia. Isabelle, Théo, and Matthew argue endlessly about movies and see themselves as characters playing roles. As the three embark on increasingly risqué sexual games, Bertolucci longs to re-create the moment when film, politics, and sex mutually reinforced each other as the preoccupations of youth. It's a saddening nostalgia, and the movie, despite its attempt to shock us with incest and perversities, has an air of inconsequence about it. The three aren't making a revolution in this hothouse, they're making a listless blue movie. In French and English.—*D.D.* (2/9/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Sunshine Cinema.)

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING

A slow, attentive movie about a painter and his model demands the kind of patience that moviegoers may feel reluctant to supply. But Peter Webber's reworking of Tracy Chevalier's novel is worth staying with: it casts a heavy spell as it unfolds the tale of Griet (Scarlett Johansson), a maid newly arrived in the house of Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). The year is 1665, and the period reconstruction, for those who are aroused by such things, is—apart from a few modern lines of dialogue—formidably detailed. The danger with such beautifying efforts is that cinema will turn into a branch of taxidermy, and what keeps Webber's movie alive is the tenseness of the setup (will this girl stay in the artist's household, and, if so, will she become his lover or his muse?) and, above all, the presence of Johansson. She is often wordless and close to plain onscreen, but wait for the ardor with which she can summon a closeup and bloom under its gaze; this is her film, not Vermeer's, all the way.—*A.L.* (12/15/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

IN AMERICA

The tale of an Irish family that travels to New York in search of a better life, or, at any rate, a life. Johnny (Paddy Considine), his wife, Sarah (Samantha Morton), and their daughters, Christy (Sarah Bolger) and Ariel (Emma Bolger), settle near Hell's Kitchen and wrestle, as you would expect, with outlandish local customs such as air-conditioners and Halloween. Despite the title, the director, Jim Sheridan, is gripped less by the country in which his characters find themselves than by their own hope and anguish: there was a third child, a boy, who died before they came to the States. The movie has a busy intensity but lacks the rooted confidence of Sheridan's Irish work, as seen in "My Left Foot" and "In the Name of the Father." What ties it down, if anything, is the performance of Sarah Bolger—ten years old when the picture was made, but the sanest and saddest person on the block.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

JANE EYRE

This burnished black-and-white 1944 adaptation boasts considerable drive and fervor early on, as young Jane (Peggy Ann Garner) rebels against the tyranny of her aunt and the life-denying religion of her charity school, and then, ten years later (in the person of Joan Fontaine), ventures out on her own to serve as a governess at a forbidding estate called Thornfield. Jane's initial collision with Thornfield's master, Edward Rochester (Orson Welles), is everything a gothic romantic encounter should be: dangerous, mysterious, and rousing. But then the screenplay loses its edge and becomes the stock tale of a stalwart woman piercing the troubled heart of an imperious rich man. Robert Stevenson directed and (along with Aldous Huxley and John Houseman) wrote the script; Bernard Herrmann composed the music; the supporting cast includes Agnes Moorehead, Margaret O'Brien (doing a comical French accent), and the luminous young Elizabeth Taylor.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; March 1-2.)

LOST BOYS OF SUDAN

As Peter and Santino, Sudanese orphans, prepare to leave their refugee camp in Kenya for a new life in the United States, a tribal elder tells them: "Don't act like those people who wear the baggy jeans, who do all the bad things in America." It's a startling and prescient statement, encapsulating both the welter of American race relations and the sense of obligation the boys will feel to the people left behind. The documentary filmmakers Megan Mylan and Jon Shenk follow the pair for a year as they adjust to a "land called Texas." Santino finds a menial job in an electronics factory, while Peter moves to Kansas City and navigates the wilds of high school. Like those of many immigrants, their experiences are bittersweet; the scene in which Peter is invited to a pizza party with Christian teen-agers is one of many surreal and heartbreaking moments.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Nothing much happens in the new film by the writer-director Sofia Coppola, but she has first-rate abilities as an observer and as a rueful comedian, and much of the movie is sweetly funny and satisfying. In Tokyo, a burned-out American movie star named Bob Harris (Bill Murray) shows up to appear in a whiskey ad. Stranded in a sleekly pompous modern hotel, he can't connect with anything or even sleep, but he does hook up (chastely) with a very young woman, Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), whose fashion-photographer husband (Giovanni Ribisi) is rapidly slipping away from her. Both Bob and Charlotte are in emotional limbo, and they become an odd, inappropriate couple. Murray has never been this quiet, this wary, this subtly acid before—or this warm, either. The drama of the movie, such as it is, lies in seeing just how much he will respond and when.—*D.D.* (9/15/03) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Quad Cinema, 64th and 2nd, and 34th Street Theatre.)

MONSTER

To play Aileen Wuornos, the real-life prostitute and serial killer who was executed in 2002, Charlize Theron put on thirty pounds and endured an hour and a half of attention each shooting day from the makeup artist Toni G. What's remarkable about the film is not just Theron's transformation into a half-mad, beaten-up prostitute, but the disciplined performance that she gives. The actress twitches and shrugs as if her tendons were directed by will alone. She's telling the world to kiss off, yet, inevitably, she's reduced to sticking out her thumb on the highway in search of a paying customer. When a scuzzy client abuses her, she snaps, empties a revolver into his chest, and lets out a war whoop of triumph. The moment is truly frightening. Theron's ferocity pushes the material over the top, but her tenderness—the flashes of gentleness and vulnerability—retrieves it from tabloid ex-

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ploitation and camp horror. With Christina Ricci as the petulant lower-middle-class girl who becomes Wuornos's lover. Written and directed by Patty Jenkins and shot in that bedraggled kingdom of chaos Central Florida.—*D.D.* (1/26/04) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

MY ARCHITECT

A traditional quest, superbly told. Nathaniel Kahn seeks to understand the life of his father, the architect Louis I. Kahn; his task is made even more difficult by the fact that Kahn had three separate and coexisting families: a wife and two mistresses with one child apiece. For his part, Nathaniel was an illegitimate son and only eleven when his father died; his interviews are laced with raw, uncut feeling for a man he never really knew. Throughout the documentary, he uses Kahn's buildings (beautifully photographed) as a kind of wedge into his father's motivations and personality. He discovers that Kahn's more famous contemporaries, like I. M. Pei, appear haunted by his career: is it better to have designed three or four unexampled buildings, as Kahn did, or to have had a successful, high-profile architectural practice? Perhaps more surprising, the women in Kahn's life don't regret the way he treated them. Anne Tyng, Kahn's co-worker and mistress, explains her affection this way: "The ideas that you work on together connect you always somehow." In the end, Nathaniel's homage to his father demonstrates what it was like to be caught in his creative whirlwind.—*M.A.* (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MYSTIC RIVER

Clint Eastwood's sombre masterpiece, from a novel by Dennis Lehane (Brian Helgeland did the adaptation), is about a working-class Catholic community in Boston held in thrall by an old crime. Back in the seventies, one of three eleven-year-old boys who were close friends was taken away by two men pretending to be cops and sexually assaulted for days before he finally escaped. But it turns out that Dave (Tim Robbins) never escaped at all. Twenty-five years later, he is still shrouded in dreams and terror, and his two friends, Sean (Kevin Bacon), a homicide detective, and Jimmy (Sean Penn), an ex-con who runs a corner grocery, still feel the shame of not helping him. When Jimmy's nineteen-year-old daughter is murdered, the three are uneasily brought back together again. The movie's feeling for the neighborhood milieu is so convincing because there's no distinction between background and foreground—everything we see (faces, living rooms, back yards, weather, battered old cars) is dramatically relevant. Eastwood directs in a gray, end-of-day light and with a minimum of camera rhetoric; he lets the script and the actors do the work. Penn does a few semi-psychotic soliloquies in which he takes off into the stratosphere, joining Marlon Brando as one of the great tragic actors of the screen.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

STRANGE FRUIT

Joel Katz's engrossing 2002 documentary puts one of Billie Holiday's signature numbers—a fierce, sardonic lament for the Southern epidemic of black lynching—through a sharp historical prism. The multiple subjects that emerge include the enduring horrors of homicidal racism and the struggle of black performers like Holiday to transmute rage and grief into art. But the movie also depicts the tradition of urban Jewish protest art as embodied by the song's writer and composer, Abel Meeropol, a prolific topical tunesmith who taught at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx and adopted the two sons of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg after the couple's execution. By the end of this picture, the story behind the song becomes as moving, ironic, and suggestive as the song itself.—*M.S.* (Anthology Film Archives; Feb. 27.)

TOUCHING THE VOID

Kevin Macdonald's new film is a dismaying documentary account of what happened on the side

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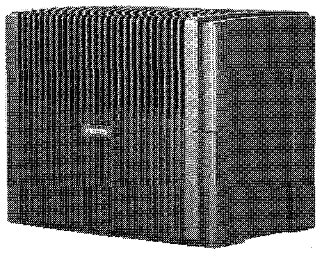

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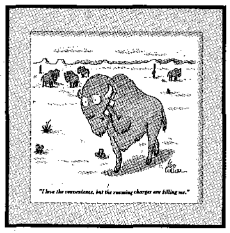
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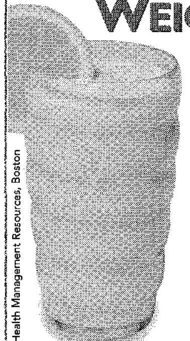

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of a mountain in 1985. Two young British climbers, Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, ascended the west face of Siula Grande, in the Peruvian Andes, and then began their descent. Simpson slipped and injured his leg, then fell again, this time off the brink of a ridge. He was hanging from the end of a rope; at the other end, sliding fast, was Yates, who cut the rope to save himself. You come out of the movie arguing hotly—as Macdonald wants you to do—about the rights and wrongs of that dire moment, and musing on the fact that Simpson survived his ordeal. The two men tell their story with a sang-froid verging on the comical, intercut with a dramatic reconstruction of the climb itself. The cinematography, all vertiginous horror and beauty, is by Mike Eley; it leaves us with a mad inkling of what drives a mountaineer, as well as a determination to stay, at all costs, on the level.—*A.L.* (1/19/04) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE TRILOGY
Three films by the Belgian director Lucas Belvaux, which form a linked chain. All are set in the same place, Grenoble, each features a similar roster of characters, and, somewhere within every picture, the same story is being told. But that is not a recipe for monotony; the hero of one film will fade into semi-obscurity in the next, and vice versa, as if we were losing touch or making fresh contact with an old friend. Then, there are the transformations of tone: the first movie ("On the Run") is hard and swift, the second ("An Amazing Couple") sunny and farcical, and the third ("After Life") a gruelling tale of drug addiction and the limits of marital love. By rights, the whole enterprise should smack of a clever trick, yet you take your leave of the trilogy—which is best viewed in one fell swoop—with a kind of exhausted regret, half-wanting to know what other permutations could be found for these difficult lives. In French.—*A.L.* (2/2/04) (Angelika Film Center and Village East Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

BARBERSHOP 2: BACK IN BUSINESS
Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

50 FIRST DATES
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THE FOG OF WAR
Angelika Film Center and Sutton 1 and 2.

KITCHEN STORIES
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

MIRACLE
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.

OSAMA
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.

THE RETURN
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE (12/1/03)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

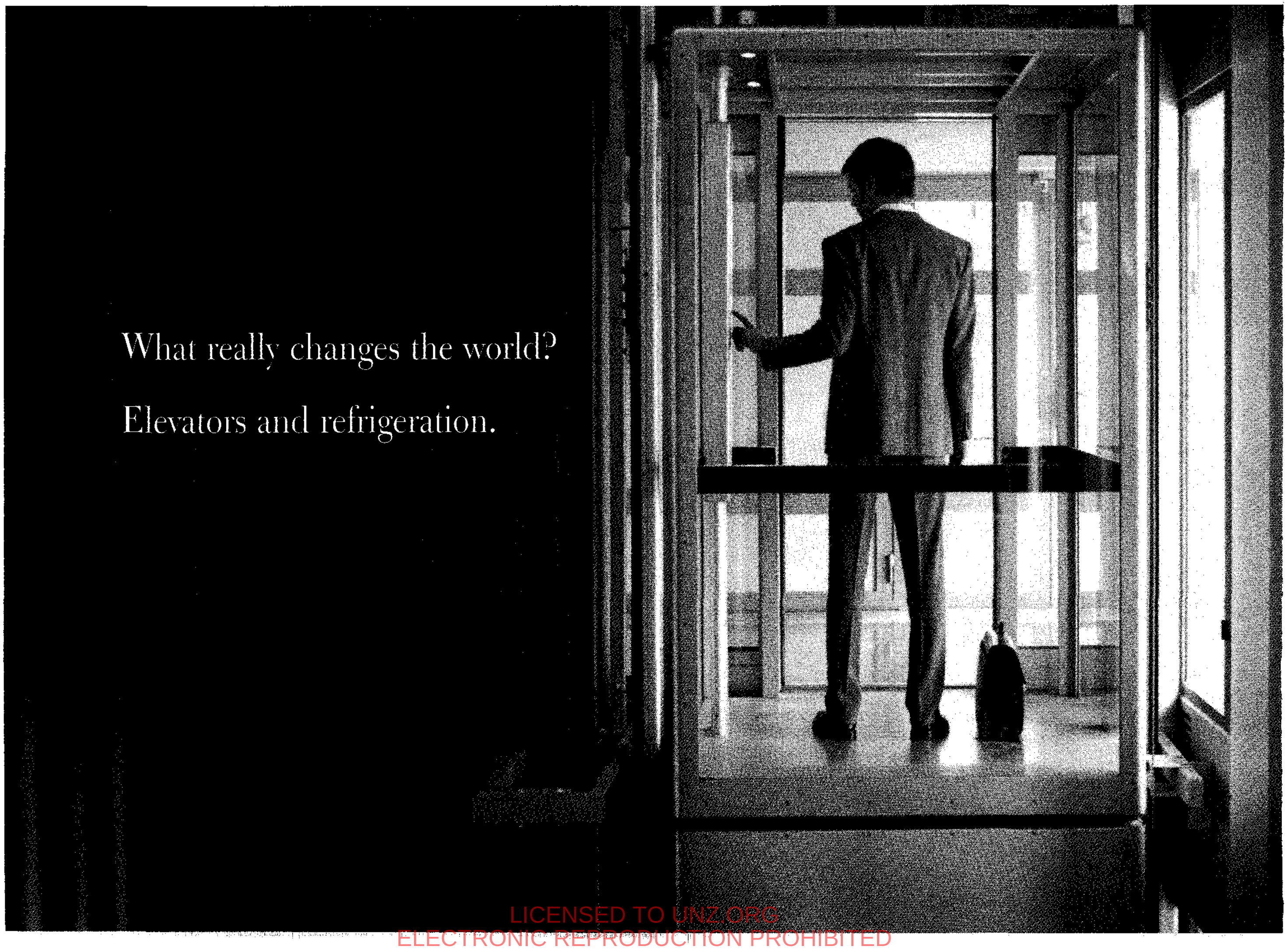
Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema Classics, 332 E. 11th St. (212-677-6309).
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through March 7: A Bernardo Bertolucci retrospec-



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tive. Feb. 28 at 1:30: "Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man" (1981; in Italian). ♦ Feb. 28 at 4: "The Sheltering Sky" (1990). ♦ Feb. 28-29 at 6:30: "Last Tango in Paris" (1972). ♦ Feb. 29 at 2: "The Last Emperor" (1987).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Films presented by *The Onion*. Feb. 26 at 8: "All the Real Girls" (2002, David Gordon Green). ♦ Through March 4: "Music and Soul in the African Diaspora." Feb. 27-March 2 at 7: "Susana Baca: Memoria Viva" (2002, Marc Dixon; in Spanish). ♦ Feb. 27 at 9: "Strange Fruit" (†). ♦ Feb. 28 at 3: "Natal Da Portela" (1988, Paulo Cezar Saraceni; in Portuguese). ♦ Feb. 28 at 5 and March 2 at 9: "Santo Domingo Blues" (2003, James Spooner; in English and Spanish). ♦ Feb. 28-29 at 9: "Remember Marvin Gaye" (2002, Richard Olivier). ♦ Feb. 29 at 3: "100% Arabica" (1997, Mahmoud Zemmouri). ♦ Feb. 29 at 5: "Karmen Geï" (2001, Joseph Gaï Ramaka; in French and Wolof). ♦ March 1 at 9: "The Last Rumba of Papa Montero" (1992, Octavio Cortazar; in Spanish).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—"Cinema Tropical." Feb. 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Under California—the Limit of Time" (1998, Carlos Bolado; in Spanish). ♦ The Best of the African Diaspora Film Festival. Feb. 26 at 4:30: "Sisters in Cinema" (2003, Yvonne Welbon). ♦ Feb. 26 at 6:50: "Afro-Punk: The Rock and Roll Nigger Experience" (2003, James Spooner). ♦ Feb. 26 at 9:30: "Susana Baca: Memoria Viva" (2002, Marc Dixon; in Spanish). ♦ A weekend of Terrence Malick films. Feb. 27 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Badlands" (†). ♦ Feb. 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Days of Heaven" (1978). ♦ Feb. 29 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "The Thin Red Line" (1998). ♦ British horror films. March 1 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Sorcerers" (1967, Michael Reeves). ♦ March 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Witchfinder General a.k.a. Conqueror Worm" (1968, Reeves).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 15: An Orson Welles retrospective. Feb. 25-26 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, and 9:20; Feb. 27-28 at 1:20, 3:20, and 5:20; and Feb. 29 at 7:20 and 9:20: "The Magnificent Ambersons" (1942). ♦ Feb. 27-28 at 7:30 and 9:30 and Feb. 29 at 2 and 4:30: "The Unknown Orson Welles," rare footage and outtakes from the Munich Filmmuseum. A different program will be shown during each time slot. ♦ March 1 at 1:30 and 5:30 and March 2 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "Jane Eyre" (†). ♦ March 1 at 3:30 and March 2 at 3:30 and 7:30: "Tomorrow Is Forever" (1945, Irving Pichel). ♦ Special event. March 1 at 7: Stefan Droessler of the Munich Filmmuseum discusses the restoration of Max Ophuls' "Lola Montes" (1955; in French).

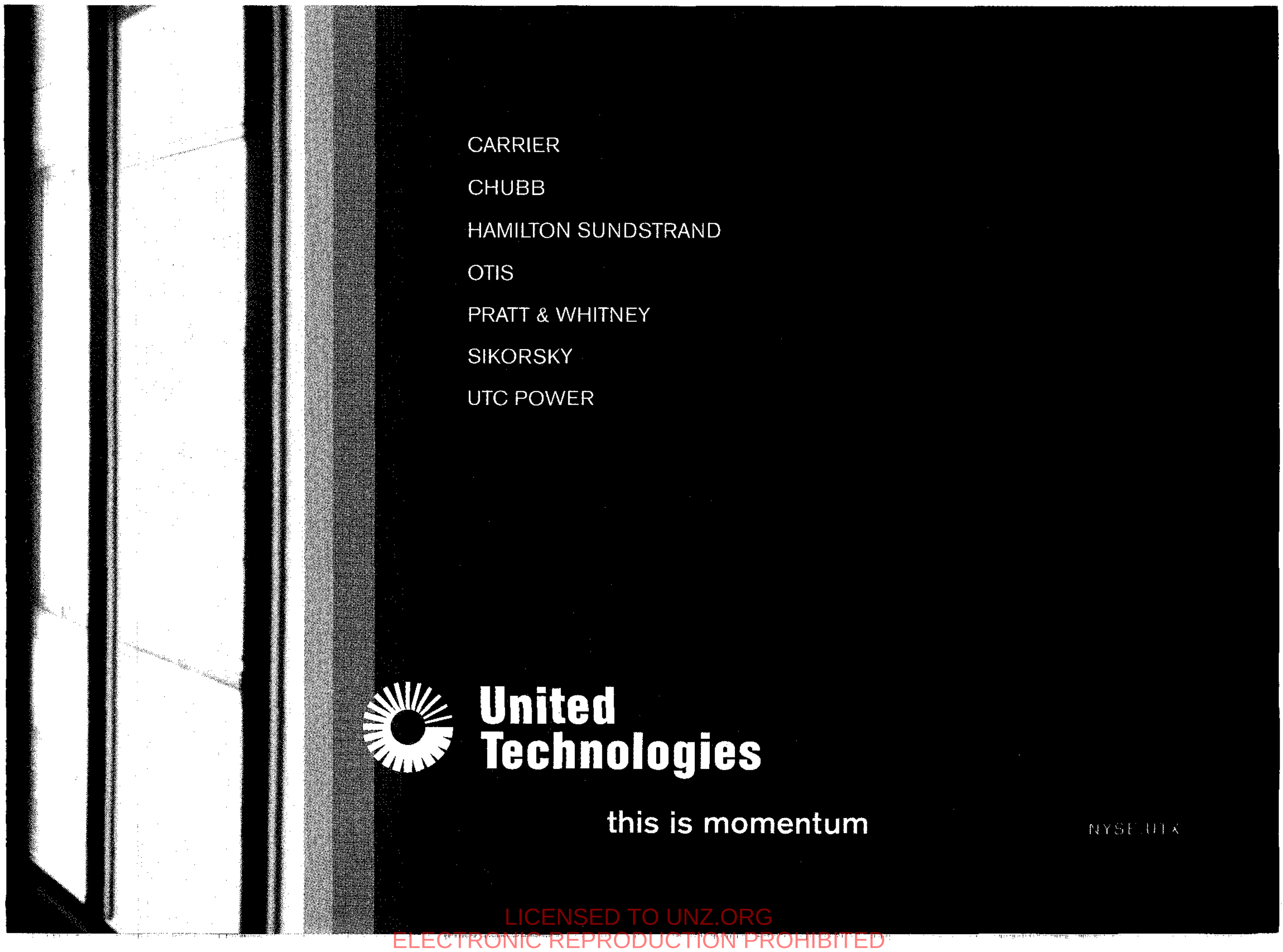
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 30: A tribute to the French studio Pathé. March 2 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Gates of the Night" (1946, Marcel Carné; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Feb. 27: "Im Kwon-Taek: Master Korean Filmmaker." All films are in Korean. Feb. 26 at 2: "Mandala" (1981). ♦ Feb. 26 at 4:15: "Chakko" (1980). ♦ Feb. 27 at 4: "Gilsodom" (1985). ♦ Through Feb. 27: "The Hidden God: Film and Faith." Feb. 26 at 6:15 and Feb. 27 at 2: "The Green Room" (1978, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ Starting Feb. 27: "Waterfront: A Journey Around Manhattan in Eighteen Films." Feb. 27 at 6:30 and Feb. 29 at 3: "Time and Tide" (2001, Peter Hutton) and "The Docks of New York" (1928, Josef von Sternberg). ♦ Feb. 27 at 8:30 and Feb. 29 at 1: "Pickup on South Street" (1953, Samuel Fuller). ♦ Feb. 28 at 1 and Feb. 29 at 7: "Up and Down the Waterfront" (1946, Rudy Burckhardt) and "Dead End" (†). ♦ Feb. 28 at 3 and Feb. 29 at 5: "Manhatta" (1921, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler) and "East Side, West Side" (1927, Allan Dwan). ♦ Feb. 28 at 5 and March 1 at 8:15: "Fulton Fish Market" (2003, Mark Street) and "Edge of the City" (1957, Martin Ritt). ♦ Feb. 28 at 7 and March 2 at 6: "Regeneration" (1915, Raoul Walsh). ♦ Feb. 28 at 8:30: "The Seafarers" (1953, Stanley Kubrick) and "On the Waterfront" (1954, Elia Kazan). ♦ March 1 at 6: "Anna Christie" (1930, Jacques Feyder; in German). ♦ March 2 at 8: "Panorama Waterfront and Brooklyn Bridge from East River" (1903, produced by Thomas A. Edison, Inc.) and "A View from the Bridge" (1962, Sidney Lumet).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Feb. 27-28: "To Die For" (1995, Gus Van Sant).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Feb. 28-29 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Bus 174" (2002, Felipe Lacerda and José Padilha; in Spanish).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Feb. 26: "*Film Comment* Selects," films chosen by the magazine's staff and contributors. A Jean-Claude Brisseau retrospective forms part of the series. All films are in French. Feb. 25 at 3 and 9: "Workers for the Good Lord" (1994). ♦ Feb. 25 at 5:10: "White Wedding" (1989). ♦ Feb. 25 at 7 and Feb. 26 at 3: "Sound and Fury" (1987). ♦ Feb. 26 at 5 and 9: "A Brutal Game" (1983). ♦ Feb. 26 at 7: "Céline" (1992). ♦ Starting Feb. 27: "Beloved Rogue: A Tribute to Vittorio Gassman." All films are in Italian. Feb. 27 at 6:30, Feb. 28 at 4:15, and Feb. 29 at 6: "The Easy Life" (1962, Dino Risi). ♦ Feb. 27 at 8:45, Feb. 28 at 6:30, and Feb. 29 at 3:50: "Scent of a Woman" (1974, Risi). ♦ Feb. 28 at 1:30 and Feb. 29 at 8:15: "The Desert of the Tartars" (1976, Valerio Zurlini). ♦ Feb. 28 at 8:45 and Feb. 29 at 1:30: "Brancaleone's Army" (1966, Mario Monicelli). ♦ March 2 at 3: "We All Loved Each Other So Much" (1974, Ettore Scola).



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THE
NEW YORKER

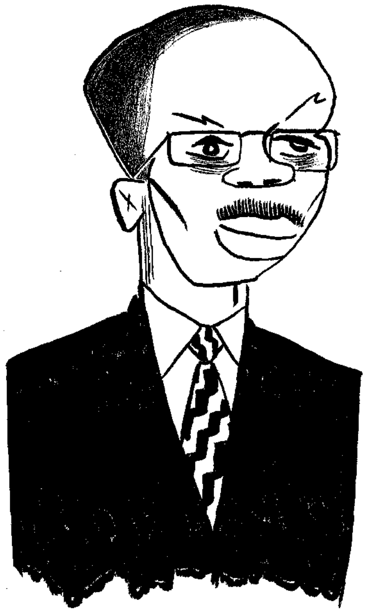
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
TEN YEARS AFTER

In 1994, President Clinton sent twenty thousand American troops to Haiti for a novel purpose in the history of American military interventions: to restore an elected government to power. Promoting democracy has become one of the Bush Administration's main justifications for the war in Iraq, but ten years ago invading Haiti on behalf of democracy was a deeply unpopular decision. At first, the unusual display of political courage was rewarded with success: President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been elected by a wide margin in 1990 but was overthrown by a military junta several months later, was reinstated with almost no American casualties. The Haitian military, which had plagued the country with coups and violent misrule almost continuously since Haiti gained independence from France, in 1804, was disbanded. So were the paramilitary death squads, known as the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, whose acronym sounds like "hit" in French. American and international forces began to retrain Haiti's notoriously corrupt police. Within two years, almost all the American troops were gone. In this country, people's attention had already moved on.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

To understand what has happened to Haiti since 1994, consider the fate of a stockpile of vintage American M-1 and M-14 rifles in the central coastal town of Gonaïves. Having been provided in previous decades to the Haitian armed forces, the weapons were confiscated when the Army was abolished. But the ex-soldiers were never reintegrated into society, and Aristide refused to risk his survival on the fragile new National Police. Instead, he created and armed militias loyal to him and his Lavalas Party. Members of these gangs are known as *chimeres*, after a fire-breathing monster of Haitian mythology; in Gonaïves, the local Lavalas militia took the initiative to name itself the Cannibal Army. In 2000, the Aristide government reportedly handed over the rifles to the Cannibal Army in order to protect polling places in a Presidential election that the opposition was boycotting because of governmental manipulation in earlier parliamentary elections. Once Aristide was reëlected, the Cannibal Army moved on to extortion, drug running, and terrorizing the opposition.



Jean-Bertrand Aristide

Last fall, the Cannibal Army's leader was killed, allegedly by an Aristide supporter. Gonaïves, a city with an insurrectionary history, began to seethe. In early February, the Cannibal Army became the Artibonite Resistance Front, and launched a full-scale revolt. "We are fighting Aristide with the weapons he gave us," the rebels' leader, who is the brother of the slain man, said. In the past few weeks, the revolt has spread to towns across Haiti's north. The turncoat militiamen have been joined, ominously, by figures from the dark past—death-squad leaders who have returned from exile and seem bent on seizing power. The turbulence is threatening famine in a country whose economy, never showing much of a pulse, has been almost obliterated by an American-led block on loans that has been in force since 2000.

Politics in Haiti is an all-or-nothing contest. Personal relationships and power determine the winners. The American intervention in 1994 seemed designed to help free Haiti from the logic of its own history. But the return to power of an elected President—a priest who raised his voice on behalf of Haiti's legions of poor people—simply put a mild, bespectacled face on the traditional way of running the country. Aristide always showed a tendency toward demagoguery, and the poor have fared at least as badly under him as under his predecessors, who ruled on behalf of the rich. Democracy depends in part on the political culture in which it grows, and Haiti's is poisoned.

There are lessons in Haiti for other parts of the world: dramatic interventions followed by elections aren't enough. In unpromising conditions, democracy will thrive only with sustained effort on the part of forces both inside and outside the country to create democratic institutions and a mentality of tolerance. There are groups in Haiti that could be the basis of such an effort: the business and civic organizations and opposition political parties that have formed a coalition under the banner of the Democratic Platform. Their demonstrations have been broken up by Lavalas thugs; leading opposition figures, including journalists, have been intimidated and even killed. These groups insist that they have no connection to the militias, but elements of the opposition are tainted by ties to the wealthy patrons of former dictatorial regimes, and the opposition as a whole has steadily rejected anything less than Aristide's departure. Haiti's crisis is becoming so desperate that the only short-term solution is more of what has disappointed the country so often in the past—outside interference.

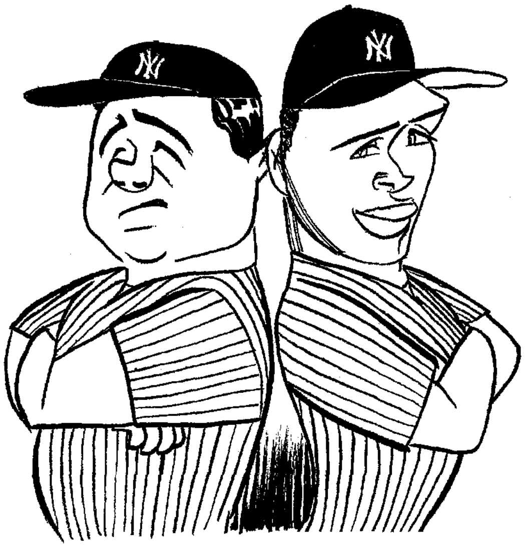
Until late last week, none was coming from Washington. President Bush and his foreign-policy advisers have never concealed their dislike for Aristide. In 1994, Dick Cheney called intervention on his behalf "an extremely bad idea," and, in the 2000 campaign, Bush said, "I wouldn't have sent troops to Haiti." But this view only repeats Clinton's mistake in focussing on one man instead of on democracy. Since 2001, the Administration has stood by and allowed Aristide to drive Haiti deeper into ruin, a posture that has encouraged the opposition to pursue the same inflexible politics as Aristide. Since the uprisings began, American officials have sent dangerously mixed messages—at times seeming to encourage Aristide's overthrow (a State Department official said that an end to the crisis "could indeed involve changes in Aristide's position"), at other times opposing regime change but refusing even to mediate, let alone intervene, to stop the spreading chaos. With Haiti, as with Liberia last summer, the Bush Administration seems to have returned to its roots in narrow realism.

We owe Haiti more than that. Regardless of historical obligations and humanitarian concerns, it's not a good precedent to allow an elected President to be toppled by armed gangs. But Aristide himself must be forced to share power before his term ends, in two years. Belatedly, an American team has been dispatched to Port-au-Prince, along with French, Canadian, and other negotiators, to try to broker a solution. By now, though, the violence has probably spread too far to be contained without more muscular intervention. The French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, has made noises about sending peacekeepers under a United Nations mandate. A joint Franco-American action in Haiti could help remedy more than one foreign-policy disaster.

—*George Packer*

ON DECK
NOTHING BUT THE BEST

At six minutes past noon last Tuesday, one of the four hundred or so reporters, columnists, and photographers who had assembled in the basement of Yankee Stadium took a cell-phone call, then quickly hung up. "A-Rod is in the building," she said, to no one in particular. A man standing behind her pulled out his own phone and dialled. "We just heard that A-Rod is in the building," he said. And so began the most exhaustively chronicled player introduction in the history of baseball. Within a few minutes, Rick Cerrone, the Yankees' media rep, had assumed podium position to explain the order of operations for "the formal portion of the program"—speeches, the obligatory donning of the pinstripes, the photo op. It was a "monumental day," the Yankees' president, Randy Levine, announced—the beginning of a "new history."



The Babe and A-Rod

A-Rod is, of course, Alex Rodriguez, baseball's most highly paid player and its best shortstop—and the Yankees' new third baseman, thanks to a surprise trade and defensive realignment that seems to have been orchestrated as much by Rodriguez's agent, Scott Boras, as by either of the teams (the Yankees and the Texas Rangers) involved. Since 1996, when Nike first sent Rodriguez a pair of cleats embroidered with the hip-hop-inspired abbreviation of his name, "A-Rod" has come to supplant Alex in much the same way that "J. Lo" has displaced Jennifer. (Rodriguez's moniker, incidentally, predates Lopez's by several years.)

George Steinbrenner likened his acquisition of A-Rod to the signing, in 1976, of another star with a famous nickname, Reggie Jackson, a.k.a. Mr. October, who was on hand at the Stadium last week, seated with the other dignitaries. But the media had an earlier, more substantial precedent in mind. As one of Wednesday's twenty-one A-Rod-related stories in the *Post* began, "The press conference to introduce Alex Rodriguez as a Yankee was of Babe Ruth proportions." *Newsday* promised "Babe Ruth, the sequel."

The parallels are numerous. For the Rangers, A-Rod wore the number three—the same number worn by the Babe in New York. (The Yankees have long since retired No. 3, and so Rodriguez will wear No. 13 here.) A-Rod, who is just twenty-eight years old, is also well positioned to go after Ruth's career home-run total of 714. Most important, though, A-Rod's arrival marks a snub of Ruthian magnitude to the rival Boston Red Sox, who tried and failed to land Rodriguez in a blockbuster trade less than two months ago, and whose owner, John Henry, used the occasion of the Yankees' coup last week to call for a league-wide salary cap. Ruth, as Red Sox fans know all

DUET ON MARS

Said Spirit to Opportunity,
  "I'm feeling rather frail,
With too much in my memory,
  Plus barrels of e-mail."

Responded Opportunity,
  "My bounce was not so bad,
But now they send me out to see
  These dreary rocks, bedad!"

"It's cold up here, and rather red,"
  Sighed Spirit. "I feel faint."
Good Opportunity then said,
  "Crawl on, without complaint!

"This planet needs our shovels' bite
  And treadmarks in the dust
To tell if life and hematite
  Pervade its arid crust."

"There's life, by all the stars above,
  On Mars—it's you and I!"
Blithe Spirit cried. "Let's rove, my love,
  And meet before we die!"

—John Updike

too well, was sold by a previous tight-fisted Boston owner, Harry Frazee, to the hated Yankees back in 1920, and Boston hasn't won a World Series since.

But was Tuesday's press conference *really* of Babe Ruth proportions? Consider this New York *Herald* report from Tuesday, January 6, 1920: " 'Babe Ruth is a Yankee!' With that simple statement Colonel Jacob Ruppert startled a score of baseball writers at the Yankee Club office yesterday." A *score* of writers? For what the *Post* the same day referred to as "the greatest one-man deal ever consummated in the history of organized baseball, or any other kind"? It must have seemed like a lot at the time. (The *Post* led its sports page—but certainly not its front page—with the Ruth sale, alongside such stories as "RECORD ENTRY LIST FOR POULTRY AND PIGEON SHOW IN THE GARDEN" and "YOUNGSTERS IN TENNIS WHO HAVE BENEFITED BY INSTRUCTION.") Ruth was in California, vacationing, and in no hurry to make a personal appearance back East. (A-Rod flew up from Florida as soon as the trade was done.) The *Times* stuck Babe, "the Colossus of Swat," on page 16 (page 1 above the fold: "50 REDS BAGGED IN NIGHT RAIDS HERE. . . . FRIEND OF TROTZKY IS TAKEN"), and reported, "Ruth expects to leave for the East next Monday."

It's instructive to remember that the Yankees, pre-Babe, were hardly worth writing about. As the *Post* explained, "The acquisition of Ruth, known to the census-taking profession as George H., will transform the Yankees from the anemic aggregation of other years to a team with a punch so potent and well distributed that to predict a pennant at the Polo Grounds next fall would be to utter a banality of purest ray serene." In acquiring Ruth for a cash sum, a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, that more than doubled the highest price ever paid before, the hapless Yankees were quite literally buying a championship—or several championships—as they are now so often accused of doing. It was the beginning of the Steinbrenner era.

In Boston, too, some things remain the same. Mayor Michael Menino weighed in last week on the A-Rod situation by saying, "Alex, you may have got away this time, but we will get you this summer." Eighty-four years ago, Mayor Andrew J. Peters had some thoughts as well. "The loss of Ruth is greatly to be regretted," he said. "It's my hope that the money received for the sale of Ruth will be used in a manner that will have its result in Boston winning the championship."

—Ben McGrath

JUST LOOKING
A NEW MALL

The new Time Warner Center on Columbus Circle long ago dropped AOL from its title, and a good thing, too. It is hard enough to put up a twin-towered building in New York now without its having to bear the name of a legendary disaster; given the resemblance of each of the towers—smooth, polished sliced monoliths—to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, there must surely have been moments when the developers wanted to turn the building on its side and bury it horizontally in the earth, dark and low, with sombre inscriptions of the names of all the employees who lost their nest eggs in the merger. Nonetheless, here it is, upright, happy, and sneering, as if to say, Hey, Chrysler and Woolworth's aren't exactly in great shape anymore, either, and look at them.

The part of the building open to the public is called, with simpering disingenuousness, the Shops at Columbus Circle, as though it were a high street, a *rue des marchés*. The cynical wise-guy thing to say is that it is a mall, and to be alternately snooty (*Do we want a mall?*) and anti-snooty snooty (*But who are we to look down our noses at malls?*). So the visitor inclined to be dubious about the conventional wisdom arrives certain that it is not going to be a mall, or, at least, that he will not see it as one.

Well, it is a mall. One enters to a giant Williams-Sonoma, winged by a Tourneau and a Hugo Boss, and then travels upstairs to a giant Borders (where the Tony Bennett CDs are, sinfully, stocked under "Easy Listening"), complete with a coffee shop where the kids drinking lattes and thumb-ing magazines look desperate to get out of this godforsaken suburb and into New York. Upstairs, the Restaurant Collection promises big-name chefs in not quite open dining rooms, but the more familiar term is food court. Also mallish is the slowed-down pace, an aimless, pick-it-up-and-put-it-down restlessness in the shopping rhythm—more Cherry Hill than Manhattan.

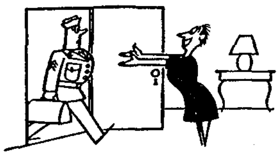
Yet malls are not without a history here. Putting aside arguable cases like Grand Central Terminal and the down-at-the-heels Manhattan Mall, what the new Time Warner Center and its shops really recall is the first fine blush of the Citicorp Center, over on Lexington Avenue at Fifty-third Street. Though callow youngsters cannot tell that building apart from the rest, it was, when it opened, in 1977, a very big deal, and it served a similar function: it was a large building put up by a large local corporation as a demonstration of faith in the city, and it, too, had a mall. Inside, there were tony shops connected by escalators, and—remember?—the era's tony restaurants, which depended on their little bit of theatre. It had a French restaurant called Les Tournebroches, where you could actually see your dinner spinning on its spit, and a Hungarian restaurant where you could cut your own piece off a giant Hungarian sausage tree. The original Conran's, with its cheap, well-made, well-chosen furniture, was the signature tenant, the Williams-Sonoma of its day.

Only when you descend to the lower level of the new Time Warner complex do you return to our own time and place—the giant Whole Foods supermarket, where organic prepared foods and organic raw foods are laid out in an abundance that puts every other food hall in this city (or any other) to shame. The smell of Indian spices rises from lentil soups; the racks of lamb in the butcher's case are tiny and pale; the fish glisten and the peppers gleam. And all of it is insistently virtuous. Farm-raised, "naturally fed," uncaged, honest, healthy. The temperature, the sense of engagement of New Yorkers, is evident here, too. It's like Fairway without the traffic jams, Dean & Deluca but five times larger, Zabar's without even the distant memory of sawdust and herring. People are really shopping down here, not looking.

This, one realizes, is their faith, our faith. Where three decades ago at the Citicorp mall we placed our faith in money and furniture, in the tangible assets of middle-class life, now we place it in things to cook and things to cook with, in Whole Foods and Williams-Sonoma—in an aesthetic whose key ingredient is its evanescence, its here-tonight, eaten-by-tomorrow instability. Our faith in shopping may be as strong as ever, but our faith in future time, on the evidence centered here, is a little shaky.

—*Adam Gopnik*

OLD FLAMES
THE GUARD YEARS



If this keeps up, the period between May, 1972, and May, 1973—the year in which almost no one seems to remember George W. Bush performing his duties as a member of the Alabama National Guard—will one day rank up there, mystery-wise, with the lost years of Shakespeare, or Chuck Barris. A few people have come forward to offer recollections of Bush reading through magazines in their offices or working for the Senate campaign that brought him to Alabama. But down in Birmingham there is a lawyer who remembers him distinctly, not only because she spent part of that year with him on the campaign but because she dated him the following summer, in Texas. Her name is Mavanee Bear; at the time, she went by Nee Hudson.

"I dated George Bush, Jr., all summer long," she wrote to a friend in the spring of 1974, after Bush had gone up North to attend Harvard Business School. "He *swears* he will never again take an active part in politics—Ho Ho—Tell me if you believe that please?"

Reached by phone last week at her law office, in Birmingham, Bear groaned at the memory, then good-naturedly tried to fill in the picture of Bush's life during and after that controversial year. The two met while working together, in the summer and fall of 1972, on Winton (Red) Blount's losing campaign for an Alabama Senate seat. A friend of the Bush family had got young George a role in the Blount campaign, and the Texas Air National Guard had granted him permission to continue his service in Alabama. "I know he served" in the Guard there, Bear said, but "I didn't see him in uniform." She does claim to remember "plenty of times" when he had to reschedule meetings because, he said, he had Guard duties to perform. Later, when they were both in Houston and had started dating—and when no one disputes that he was serving—she frequently saw him in uniform. "I think he was mostly just flying in circles over Houston," she said.

As for Bush's vow never to participate in politics again, she said, "You have to understand, we had just lost like dogs. Also, his dad had just been defeated"—in his 1970 bid for a Texas Senate seat. "It was a hard time. We all felt the antiwar culture. We all felt, Let us get out of Vietnam! Everyone was so burned up about it. Everyone had lost friends and family. It was an awful thing." She believes that Bush shared her anguish over the war, "but he never would have spoken up about it publicly, because of his father." She went on, "He was so aware of his family name. Everywhere he went, he encountered a lot of animosity from people who didn't even know him, because of his father. I remember taking him with me to a lovely party, and a drunken person came up to him and said, 'You're a piece of shit, just like your father.' And these were nice people! My friends! People were just awful to him."

She added, "We went to a lot of parties. And we all sat around and drank a lot of beer and talked, and ate a lot of peanuts at baseball games, using his father's seats. But nobody was throwing up or falling down." She will allow, however, that he was slovenly. "His apartment in Houston was really crappy. He sure didn't live fancy. I mean, you wouldn't want to sit down. It was just a dump!" When he wasn't in the apartment, she said, "he lived out of the back seat of his Oldsmobile. It was also filthy—just littered with tennis shoes and tennis racquets and wrappers. It was a mess!"

Bush, she recalls, loved what she thinks of as "real Texas." Together, they rode horses and went to dances in V.F.W. halls. "We listened to Bob Wills, and danced with these little German-immigrant ladies in their starched dresses."

Bear said, "I didn't see him as lost. He just hadn't decided yet who he was going to be when he grew up."

—*Jane Mayer*

CAMPAIGN JOURNAL
TAKE THIS JOB

John Edwards's advance teams like to arrange the places where he appears on the campaign trail to resemble theatres in the round. Edwards holds forth from floor level or on a low stage, wearing a cordless clip-on microphone that leaves his arms free for sweeping, two-handed, umpire-like gestures. He seems to have sprung up from the crowd, which is very much how he wishes to be regarded—as a man of the people and the voice of the people at once. By contrast, John Kerry usually stands on a stage, his shoes roughly level with the eyes of the people beneath him. The effect of being addressed from on high is amplified by Kerry's lanky figure—six feet four and bony—and his habit of emphasizing his points with long, jabbing wags of his index finger. When the two Democrats appear simultaneously on a split screen, Edwards could be mistaken for Kerry's sign-language interpreter.

Actually, the seemingly spontaneous Edwards has been delivering the same stump speech—verbatim, and gesture for gesture—for months now, while Kerry, despite looking like an equestrian statue (man and horse) and sounding like a relic from radio's golden age, has been more responsive to the shifting issues and moods of the political season. But Edwards's tactic gave him a surprising advantage. As President Bush's vulnerability on the issues of free trade and job loss became apparent, Edwards succeeded in casting himself as the steadfast champion of the disenfranchised, and Kerry has been made to appear as if he were responding to his challenger's agenda.

Nevertheless, Kerry has been racking up endorsements from organized labor, and, shortly after dawn on primary day in Wisconsin, a few hundred of his supporters huddled in the Crystal Ballroom of the Hilton in downtown Milwaukee under the banner of a consortium of nineteen unions that together represent some five million workers. They were predominantly heavyset and gray-haired; there weren't many women among them, and, despite a few alarmingly tanned union bosses, nearly everyone was white. Whenever a speaker denounced Bush or praised Kerry, the crowd erupted in a frenzy—roaring, whistling, and waving campaign signs. But at the back of the room Guy Prickett, a sturdily built, full-bearded assembler for Mercury—the boat-motor manufacturer—stood with his hands shoved defiantly in his pockets, silently shaking his head.

Prickett, who had come to the Hilton with his wife, a Kerry supporter, still hadn't decided whom he'd vote for. Pressed to venture a guess, he said, "We got four hundred jobs we're losing at my plant—four hundred jobs going to China," and he allowed that he was inclined to vote for Edwards. Just then, Kerry was hailed as the next President of the United States.

ERIC PALMA

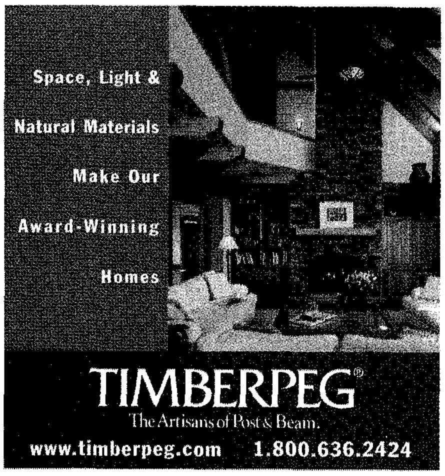
Prickett winced. "Not so fast, John Kerry," he said, echoing Edwards's line at a debate two nights earlier, when Kerry got caught sounding as if he were already the nominee. Prickett couldn't help chortling, though, when the Teamsters' president, James P. Hoffa, began cheering, "Send Bush to Mars! Send Bush to Mars! Send Bush to Mars!"

There is no getting around the sheer carnival goofiness of an American political campaign. Civilization-defining issues may hang in the balance, but the asinine and the inane always hover close at hand. Kerry, who frequently expresses the conviction that more is at stake for America and the world this year than in any election since he was born, loped onto the stage of the Crystal Ballroom to the romping strains of Chumbawamba's song "Tubthumping," with its rat-a-tat refrain: "I get knocked down, but I get up again." When Kerry first got knocked down in this campaign, the issue was the war in Iraq, or, rather, the populist antiwar message that spurred Howard Dean's rise last year. Now the issue is the way Edwards has defined himself as an opponent of NAFTA, which Kerry supported.

Although Kerry didn't mention Edwards by name in Milwaukee, he was at pains to assure his union supporters that he got the message. He denounced "the creed of greed licensed by the Bush Administration" and said that during the time Bush was watching a NASCAR race in Florida, two days earlier, three hundred and fifty manufacturing jobs were lost in America, a hundred and seventy-eight million dollars were added to the deficit, and seven hundred people lost their health-care coverage. Kerry called for a policy of "smart trade," a middle ground between free trade and protectionism, to be arrived at by fine-tuning and enforcing current policies rather than scrapping them. "If you give the American worker a level playing field to compete on, there is no one in the world the American worker can't compete with," he said, and Guy Prickett finally drew his hands from his pockets and applauded. "It's what I want to hear," he said, "but I'm still hanging on the fence—and most of me's hanging on Edwards's side. With Kerry, I just wonder if he's as sincere as he says he is."

Enough Wisconsin voters felt the same way as Prickett to trim Kerry's margin of victory in the state to the point where his win looked almost like a loss. Indeed, one of the chief surprises of this primary season is that the support of union leaders can no longer be presumed to translate into the support of their followers. Last fall, the same unions that rallied to Kerry's cause in Milwaukee backed Dick Gephardt in Iowa, and what good did it do him? For a candidate, such voter unpredictability is torment. But the friction of the issues has been good for Democrats. Both Kerry and Edwards emerged from Wisconsin on top, insofar as opinion polls showed that either could beat Bush by ten points.

—*Philip Gourevitch*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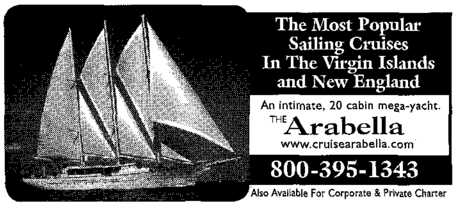
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AROUND CITY HALL

THE UN-COMMUNICATOR

The Mayor is doing a good job. Why don't people like him?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

The week before Christmas, Mayor Michael Bloomberg was the featured speaker at an awards ceremony honoring members of the New York City Law Department. The ceremony took place at City Hall, in the Council Chamber—a room made briefly famous last summer when a council member was shot to death there—which seats more than five hundred people. Not a single chair was empty when the Mayor arrived, accompanied by the head of the Law Department, Michael Cardozo. "When I walked in, I said to him, 'Who are these people?' " Bloomberg began, nodding in Cardozo's direction. "He said, 'Oh, they're all lawyers,' and I said, 'Ugh, my worst nightmare!' I never had any interest in going to law school, so if you stay out of my business I will stay out of yours." The crowd laughed.

"Let me point out to you that this is the third event I've been invited to by the Law Department, but it's the first one I've made," the Mayor said. "Now, I did cancel out on a picnic, I remember that. There was something else—two picnics? It wasn't because I didn't want the food or drink. I forget what it was, but I had good reasons. But yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, and to the extent that I'm it, here I am, in flesh and blood." The crowd laughed again, with noticeably less enthusiasm.

"My job tonight is to congratulate all those of you who are receiving awards," he continued. "Some of you have been recognized for continuous service for twenty-five or thirty years. I can only tell you that at my last job—no, two jobs ago—had they not fired me I would have made thirty-plus years. My next job, after twenty years I decided I would fire myself. And now, based on my polls, the public wants to fire me. Hey, you know, things happen."

Bloomberg, who recently turned sixty-two, has just passed the midpoint of his first term as mayor. He is, up close, surprisingly short, with a long face, graying hair, and brown eyebrows. All joking aside, he is not very popular. Documenting the degree of his disfavor has by now passed from the realm of social science almost into sport. Last summer, the *Times* declared that Bloomberg had scored the lowest approval rating ever—twenty-four per cent—in the history of its mayoral poll. A few months later, Quinnipiac University pollsters did the *Times* one better, reporting that only twenty-three per cent of New Yorkers wanted to see him reelected. The university's pollsters also asked New Yorkers to imagine having Bloomberg over for Thanksgiving dinner. More than sixty per cent said they'd prefer not to. ("Well, that's good," the Mayor quipped. "Because I have plans with my family.") In January, in an obvious attempt to reverse this trend, the Mayor promised city homeowners a rebate on their property taxes, and his ratings did improve. Nevertheless, in the latest public-opinion survey, once again by Quinnipiac, only twenty per cent of respondents said that the Mayor was "warm and friendly," while sixty-six per cent called him "cold and businesslike." The list of politicians who, having looked at the numbers, are considering challenging Bloomberg next year includes not only Democrats, like City Council Speaker Gifford Miller and the former Bronx borough president Fernando Ferrer, but also, more ominously, Republicans, like Congressman Vito Fossella, of Staten Island, and the former City Council minority leader Thomas Ognibene. "I don't think he's provided effective leadership," Ognibene told me recently. "His attitude is 'Look, I believe this is the right thing to do; if you don't like it, get used to it.' "

Bloomberg's travails have all the makings of a morality tale. In this version of "Arrogance O'erthrown," a rich man uses his wealth to have his way, only to get his comeuppance. (The seventy-two million dollars Bloomberg spent on his mayoral campaign was more than anyone else had ever spent seeking that office by nearly a factor of five.) But what this story, however edifying, omits is Bloomberg's actual record. In an alternative telling—more of a black comedy—things run as follows: Residents of a battered city elect a man with no relevant experience to lead them out of a crisis. He does a far better job than they have any right to expect, and for this they punish him. Either account would be troubling to most people; Bloomberg, though, is not the sort to dwell on unpleasantness, which is doubtless a continuing factor in his difficulties. As he told the members of the Law Department, in between lawyer jokes and unself-conscious allusions to his wealth, no matter what happens two years from now, he'll still be way ahead of everybody else: "I always say that my Plan B is better than the other guy's Plan A."

Arnold Roth

Mayor Bloomberg hates whiners. "There are people who just want to complain," he has said.

Traditionally, mayors deliver the State of the City address at City Hall; Bloomberg favors more far-flung sites. Last year, it was the conservatory at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden; this year, it was Silvercup Studios, in Long Island City, where "The Sopranos" and "Sex and the City" are shot.

The theme of the address was "our New York," and Bloomberg began, as he often does, with a string of figures. "Our New York," he informed the audience—mainly politicians and community leaders—consists of "eight million citizens, three million immigrants, 1.1 million schoolchildren, and seventeen hundred beautiful parks." He then listed some encouraging statistics—"Unemployment is at a twenty-month low. . . . In November alone, twenty-nine thousand New Yorkers found jobs. . . . Residential property values are fifteen per cent higher than they were a year ago"—in the process knocking "a lot of self-styled experts" who, he said, "were ready to write New York off" just two years ago.

"The naysayers, the doom-and-gloom crowd, those who have attempted to gain personal publicity or political advantage by trumpeting bad omens and embracing negative thinking, have been proved wrong once again," Bloomberg declared. "Perfect we're not. But who would want to live elsewhere?"

Bloomberg hates whiners. This is the central theme of his rhetoric (if someone who has so little interest in public speaking can be said to have a rhetoric). He once told me, "There are people who just want to complain, and I don't ever want to go home and look in the mirror and say I just complained."

Between the World Trade Center attack and the collapse of the stock market, Bloomberg took office, on New Year's Day, 2002, at something very close to the worst possible moment. Before he had moved—or, rather, not moved—into Gracie Mansion, the city was already facing a budget gap of nearly five billion dollars. Nine months later, the gap had grown to six and a half billion dollars and was on the same scale as the deficit that brought the city to the edge of bankruptcy in 1975.

Instead of bemoaning the problem, Bloomberg acted as if it were no big deal; indeed, he warned the "naysayers" and "the doom-and-gloom crowd" that the real danger lay in overreacting. First, he borrowed two and a half billion dollars. Then he uncomplainingly cut spending by three billion dollars. Finally, just as cheerfully, he raised taxes by three billion dollars. At every stage, Bloomberg declared that what he was doing was the only sensible course, even when it contradicted what he had declared the only sensible course a few months earlier. (Raising taxes would "scare people away," he said at one point. "I don't believe that people will leave this city because of higher taxes," he said at another.) In the middle of all this, he also decided to ban smoking in restaurants and bars. The move may well have made sense on public-health grounds, but in terms of public relations it was a disaster, furthering the impression of Bloomberg as an élitist and earning him the nickname "the nanny Mayor." (Last month, after the *Times* reported that Bloomberg had attended a dinner at the St. Regis, where, in clear violation of the law, some of the city's top financiers had lit up cigars, the *Post* opined that "public puffing" was apparently O.K. with the Mayor as long as "you're a fellow gazillionaire.")

By Bloomberg's upbeat logic, the way the city has come through its difficulties more than justifies his decisions as mayor and, in a broader sense, his whole approach. The city is poised to end the current fiscal year with a significant surplus, and recently two of the major bond-rating

ARNOLD ROTH

BEER
ZIEGLER

"O.K. That's my list. You got anything on your list?"

• •

agencies—Moody's and Fitch—changed their outlook on the city's finances from "negative" to "stable." The logic of politics, however, is more perverse. It runs something like this: serious problems produce crises; therefore problems resolved without a crisis can't have been very serious. When Bloomberg levied a surcharge on the sales tax, when he doubled fines for parking tickets, and when he raised everyone's property taxes by nearly twenty per cent, he may have seen himself—justifiably—as averting a citywide disaster. All many members of the public saw, though, was that, at nearly every turn, he was making their lives more difficult.

Marc Shaw, the city's Deputy Mayor for Operations, described the Mayor's predicament to me this way: "At some level, people don't quite appreciate how dire the city's situation was, in part because he was so successful in dealing with it." I met a carpenter in the Bronx who told me that he hadn't been able to afford Christmas presents for his kids because he'd had to put all his available cash into paying off parking tickets. He characterized Bloomberg's position somewhat differently: "He's a rich man and he don't give a shit about anybody else."

In the summer of 2001, while campaigning for mayor in Crown Heights, Bloomberg ran across a leaky fire hydrant. When he asked an aide how a problem like this could be reported, he was told that someone would have to call the designated number at the city agency responsible for resolving it, and that, in the case of the leaking hydrant, this was the help line at the Department of Environmental Protection. Bloomberg, according to the aide, was appalled. "That's crazy," he declared.

Not long ago, I went on a tour of the city's new 311 call center, which Bloomberg created to replace the help line at the D.E.P., along with every other question-and-complaint line in the city. The center, on Maiden Lane, in lower Manhattan, is run by Gino Menchini, the commissioner of the city's Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications. A genial man with a round face and a fringe of brown hair, Menchini recalled being introduced by the Mayor at an event in the spring of 2002 as "Gino Menchini, who will not be here next year if 311 is not up and running." The center accepted its first calls in March, 2003, and now receives an average of thirty-five thousand a day.

Menchini showed me around several cavernous rooms filled with rows of identical desks on which sat identical phones and identical computer screens. Every few seconds, someone would answer one of the phones with the identical greeting: "Thank you for calling New York City." One call I listened in on was from a man who wanted to dispose of a sofa. (He was told to put it on the sidewalk on the next trash-pickup day.) A woman wanted an order of protection against her ex-husband, who kept showing up at her apartment. A second woman wanted the number for a Jil Sander store. (Apparently, she had meant to call 411.) Calls to 311 are summarized daily on a four-color chart—a record, in effect, of everything that has gone wrong over the previous twenty-four hours.

The Mayor is very proud of the new system and likes to call in himself to complain, usually about potholes he has ridden over. A few months ago, as he was driving around the city, Bloomberg was struck, unfavorably, by the amount of garbage he saw on the streets. He asked Menchini to break out the figures involving the Department of Sanitation, and now each week gets a special chart chronicling the number of calls about such unpleasantnesses as missed recycling pickups (more than fifteen thousand so far this year) and dead animals on the sidewalk (nearly four thousand). "This allows us for the first time to manage the system," Menchini told me. "If you're looking for accountability, this is it."

Bloomberg's passion for management and systems—and, one is tempted to say, even rationality—sets him apart from other elected officials. "The Mayor focusses on efficiency, getting the most out of your resources," Ray Kelly, the police commissioner, told me. "It's more like a business than any administration I've ever worked for." Not only does Bloomberg believe that sensible management will solve New York's problems; he seems to believe that everyone else can be made to believe it, too. (One prominent city official described this habit of mind to me as the Mayor's "Don Quixote complex.") On more than one occasion, this Harvard Business School version of idealism has got him into a great deal of trouble.

Consider, for example, last year's firehouse controversy. Over the past quarter century, the number of fires in New York has declined by nearly sixty per cent, but the number of firehouses has remained essentially constant. Bloomberg decided to shut three of the city's least utilized firehouses and reduce staffing levels at three others.

Reaction to the Mayor's plan ran

the gamut of emotions from outrage to apoplexy. In Williamsburg, where Engine Company 212—known locally as the People's Firehouse—was slated for closure, residents hung banners out their windows with messages like "Budgets Slashed, Brooklyn Burned" and set up a twenty-four-hour-a-day vigil in a tent pitched outside the station. One community group claimed to have calculated that Bloomberg's proposal showed he valued the lives of people in the neighborhood at less than the cost of "a cup of coffee or yogurt." The battle over the Mayor's plan raged for months, during which time virtually every other politician in the city weighed in against it. Even Hillary Clinton got into the act, calling firehouse closings "totally unacceptable." When it finally ended, last May, the Mayor succeeded in closing most of the firehouses on his list, including Engine 212. A few weeks later, while attending a hundredth-anniversary celebration for the Williamsburg Bridge, he was booed, thereby acquiring, courtesy of the *News*, the sobriquet Mayor Booberg. All together, the closings will save the city about eight million dollars a year, a sum that even some of the Mayor's advisers concede—privately, at least—wasn't nearly worth what he paid for it.

By far the largest management challenge Bloomberg has taken on is the public school system. He has relocated the system's administrative offices from downtown Brooklyn to the Tweed Courthouse, right behind City Hall; instituted a uniform curriculum for students in kindergarten through eighth grade; and, what's most significant, eliminated the city's thirty-two community school districts, which were run—sort of—by thirty-two independently elected school boards. As Bloomberg more or less openly acknowledges, he has no particular educational philosophy. "Do we have the right solution?" he asked in a recent speech, referring to his reorganization plan. "Is there *a* solution? No, probably not." Instead, the changes he has made all reflect, once again, his abiding belief in the power of a flowchart. The schools are now divided into ten regional districts. In each of these districts a regional superintendent oversees ten instructional superintendents, and each instructional superintendent oversees, roughly speaking, ten schools. The so-called 10-10-10 plan has very clear lines of authority, which is also to say of accountability, all of which lead directly to the Mayor. When, in December, police had to quell a near-riot at a Queens high school and a teacher was beaten up at a junior high school in the Bronx, it was Bloomberg who took responsibility, saying, "Plain and simple, we haven't done a good job."

In the long term, it is quite possible that Bloomberg's efforts to systematize the school system will lead to significant improvements. In the meantime, however, it is the political risks of the endeavor that are most apparent. During the weeks leading up to last November's election, Bloomberg pressed for a change to the city charter that would have made mayoral races nonpartisan. He spent more than seven million dollars of his own money trying to rally support for this initiative, but it was still voted down—embarrassingly—by a margin of more than two to one. The measure's defeat was widely attributed to the opposition of the city's municipal unions, led by the teachers, who campaigned hard against it. No sooner had the votes been counted than the chairman of the state's Democratic Party, State Assemblyman Herman (Denny) Farrell, announced, "The campaign to replace the Mayor begins tonight."

Among the potential challengers to the Mayor, Bill Thompson, Jr., the city comptroller, is considered by many in City Hall to be the most formidable. This is owing partly to his personality (he seems fairly to radiate calm) and partly to demographics (he is black). "There are a number of things I give the Mayor a positive grade on," Thompson, a Democrat from Brooklyn, told me recently. "He's hired a very talented group. He's run city services well. He's approached things in a balanced fashion. He's improved the tone in New York City, so things aren't so hostile.

"But the mayor is not just a C.E.O.," Thompson went on, offering what is—in political circles, at least—the standard critique of Bloomberg. "The mayor is an emotional leader, an inspirational leader, and in that regard I don't think he's done nearly as good a job. You just went through a period of tax increases and budget cuts. Well, why? I don't think that was ever explained. There was no engagement, no discussion."

Former Mayor Ed Koch made much

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the same point to me: "I think Bloomberg's done a terrific job and is vastly unappreciated. And, in my judgment, it's because he doesn't explain adequately what he's doing. He's got to appear more where people can see him and hear him." Tradition has it that the mayor hold so-called town-hall meetings in neighborhoods around the city, at which ordinary citizens can speak to him directly about local concerns. Both Koch and Giuliani held such meetings at least monthly; although he sometimes speaks to community groups, Bloomberg has yet to hold a single one. "If I were him, I would plan a campaign—I'm not talking about the actual campaign—of access, meaning town-hall meetings," Koch told me. "He doesn't like them. You know, so what? Occasionally you do something you don't like."

Bloomberg refused repeated requests to be interviewed for this article, because, I was told, he hadn't liked an earlier article of mine. When I met him at the annual Christmas party for the City Hall press corps, though, he was cordial. Apropos of nothing in particular, he told me a joke, an updated version of the old Ivy League fund-raising quip:

Q: What's the best way to find Osama bin Laden?

A: Send a million-dollar pledge to the Princeton development office in his name and leave the return address blank.

The politicians' critique of Bloomberg as a weak communicator is, in a certain sense, the inverse of the average voter's: it's not that the Mayor is arrogant and unfeeling; it's just that he comes across that way. "Have you ever been with him to a funeral?" one prominent elected official asked me. "He says some of the right things, but he just can't say it like he means it, even though I think he *does* mean it."

Bloomberg's extraordinary wealth allowed him to become mayor without having to accommodate himself to the humbling facts about democracy, one of which is that in the course of representing people one is often obliged to say and do things—call it coalition-building, call it pandering—that one doesn't entirely agree with. ("I'm supposed to say 'Ho, ho, ho,' " the Mayor told the crowd at the Christmas party for the press. "So 'Ho, ho, ho.' ")

I spoke to the leaders of half a dozen civic organizations and lobbying groups who, on the basis of the Mayor's agenda, should have been his allies. They all had similar stories to tell. Whereas previous administrations put a great deal of effort into trying to line up support for their initiatives, Bloomberg, they said, simply announces his.

"The point is people like to feel they're participating," the head of one civic association told me. "They like to be asked. Mike's always been someone who never asks for help, and the result is he gets himself isolated from political supporters." This isolation affects more than just Bloomberg's own standing. Last year, for example, the Mayor proposed a commuter tax, which would have required the approval of the state legislature. Lawmakers in Albany never even made a pretense of considering it. Although Bloomberg has been generous in his backing of Governor George Pataki—he personally donated more than a million dollars to various Republican state committees during Pataki's reëlection campaign—the Governor has done almost nothing in return, either for him or for the city. In fact, Pataki has sued to prevent the city from getting five hundred million dollars in state aid promised to it by the legislature. Recently, Bloomberg travelled to Albany to testify on Pataki's latest proposed budget, under which an increase in city school aid would be financed through a new form of state-sponsored gambling: video lottery terminals. The Mayor voiced his criticism of the proposal so politely—or blandly—that afterward, in a private meeting, the Governor thanked him for his nonconfrontational approach. As one civic leader who deals extensively with both men put it to me, "I'm sure Pataki loves Bloomberg, because Bloomberg is so politically inept."

Recently, on a bitter-cold evening, Bloomberg went out to Brooklyn, to an area on the border between Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights, to address a group that calls itself the United Neighbors Association of Fort Hamilton Parkway. It was the last event of what had been a long and trying day. NY1, the city's cable news channel, had caught the Mayor on tape calling Robert Atkins, the late diet doctor, "fat" and insinuating to a group of firefighters that Dr. Atkins's death had somehow been weight-related: "I don't believe that bullshit that he dropped dead slipping on the sidewalk. Yeah, right!" (Bloomberg had also volunteered to the firemen that the food at a fund-raiser he'd attended at the doctor's home had been less than savory: "I took one appetizer, and I had to spit it into my napkin.") In the way of such things, the story threatened to become all-consuming. That morning, at an induction ceremony for police recruits at which the Mayor had clearly hoped to showcase his impressive record on crime—it has dropped ten per cent during his tenure, even though the N.Y.P.D. is operating with several thousand fewer cops than it did under Giuliani—he had to spend most of his time fending off questions on nutrition. ("You are what you eat," he volunteered wanly.)

The United Neighbors were holding their meeting at a V.F.W. Hall on Fort Hamilton Parkway, in a narrow room still strung with Christmas lights. By the time the Mayor got there, it was nearly eight o'clock, and the small hall was packed. The crowd—about fifty people—greeted Bloomberg unusually warmly. "I figured a man with all that money would come off high and mighty, but he comes across very down-to-earth," a retired policeman I was standing next to told me. Everyone listened intently as the Mayor, in no particular order, ran through some of the topics that were on his mind: "Turns out right now the streets are as clean as they've been in thirty years. . . . If you see trash on the streets, just pick up the phone and call 311. . . .The Fire Department's doing a good job. I moved some resources around—that was very controversial." When Bloomberg described his latest policy initiative—his plan to hand out the property-tax rebate to homeowners—a hearty cheer went up.

If approved by the City Council and the state legislature, the Mayor's tax-rebate plan will deliver checks to six hundred and seventy thousand homeowners sometime over the summer. According to City Hall's own estimate, this munificence will cost New York roughly two hundred and fifty million dollars. (No checks will go to commercial real-estate owners, who actually pay the lion's share of the city's property taxes.) As an example of both bad tax policy and bad fiscal policy—Diana Fortuna, the president of the Citizens Budget Commission, a watchdog group, immediately gave it a thumbs-down—the Mayor's rebate would be hard to beat. But in this case, finally, Bloomberg shows a clear grasp of the political situation.

There are still almost two years to Bloomberg's term, and it's impossible to say what direction he's headed in—whether it's along the high, self-punishing road of closing unneeded firehouses and banning smoking, or along the lower, better-travelled road of mailing out tax rebates. Just in the past two months, the Mayor has quietly dropped plans to overhaul the city's cabaret law and to revamp its system of property-tax assessment—in both cases, it appears, in order to avoid controversy. As a Democrat turned Republican in a mostly Democratic city, Bloomberg is, in the abstract, vulnerable from both sides; as a practical matter, any candidate prepared to shell out seventy-five million dollars heads into a municipal election with a large presumptive advantage. Whatever happens, it's been an interesting experiment, even if one that only confirms what City Hall insiders knew all along—that when voters say they don't like politicians, they don't know what they're talking about.

After Bloomberg had finished his spiel to the crowd in the V.F.W. Hall, he took a few questions, some of which he knew the answers to and some of which he acknowledged, quite frankly, that he did not. As he was making his way back to his car, several people asked him to pose for a photograph, and a few others asked him for an autograph. People were obviously flattered that the Mayor—or, what is perhaps more pertinent, a billionaire—had taken the time to meet with them, and they kept thanking him for having driven all the way out to their neighborhood. Bloomberg kept insisting that he was happy to be there.

"You don't understand," he said to one woman who was particularly vociferous in her gratitude. "I like this!" ♦

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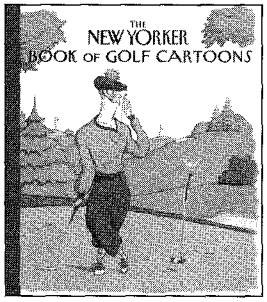
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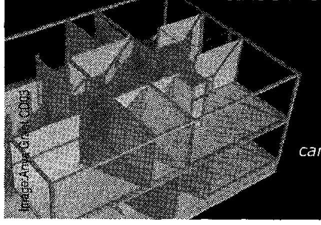

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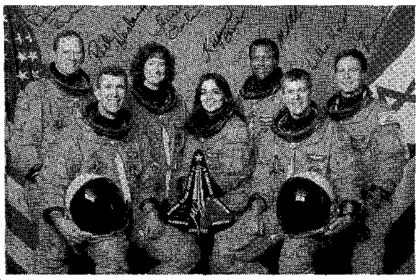

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SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

BY ANDREW BARLOW

> Soft drink makers Coke and Pepsi are testing a cola that has fewer calories than the original and a different flavor than the diet version often turned to by weight-conscious consumers. The concept is called mid-calorie cola. The idea is to market a product in the middle, one that offers good taste but with only a fraction of the calories of regular soda.
>
> —*Associated Press.*

Pepsi has announced that its lemon-flavored cola, Pepsi Twist, will soon be available in a caffeine-free version. A spokesperson for Pepsi says that the new beverage is expected to appeal to cola drinkers who enjoy the flavor of Pepsi Twist but do not wish to consume caffeine.

Soft-drink giant Coke will soon combine elements from two of its latest creations, Mid-Calorie Coke and Vanilla Coke, to create a beverage that will be known as Mid-Calorie Vanilla Coke. Coke will also begin distributing caffeine-free versions of Vanilla Coke and Diet Vanilla Coke. The company is rumored to be testing a version of Vanilla Coke that has a somewhat, but not entirely, reduced caffeine level.

Correcting an oversight, Coke will soon rush-distribute a caffeine-free version of Mid-Calorie Vanilla Coke. A Coke spokesperson said, "Now cola drinkers who desire a mid-calorie, vanilla-flavored cola that has no caffeine can at last be a part of the Coke family."

Three new Pepsi beverages will soon be available at your local Pepsi store. The first, PepsiCK, will be thirty per cent Coke. The second, Pepsi300, will feature a traditional amount of vanilla flavoring and three times the calories of regular Pepsi. It will be available in five different caffeine levels. The third drink, Chunky Pepsi, will contain whole cocoa beans. This beverage has tested well among older cola drinkers. (Coke, not to be outdone, will begin distributing its own chunky soda, Coke Grovestand, next year.)

Coke has announced that Coke Grovestand will be made available in a mid-calorie version.

Next year, Pepsi will introduce a line of carbonated beverages that have more sodium than any previous cola. The first of these will be Caffeine-Free Diet Vanilla Mid-Lemon Pepsi with Additional Sodium, in a version that has a reduced amount of potassium benzoate. The beverage will have a national ad campaign starring Christine Todd Whitman. A Pepsi spokesperson said, "We have found that, of our customers who enjoy the refreshing taste of Caffeine-Free Diet Mid-Lemon Pepsi, there are several thousand who enjoy vanilla flavoring in addition to the physiological effects of a very high sodium intake. Then, of those valued customers, there are four—maybe six—who desire the possible health benefits of consuming less potassium benzoate, a preservative we use in our diet colas. We believe that these customers are the authors of a 1989 study in which potassium benzoate was found to cause cancer in several rats. Though their findings are questionable, we salute the bright scientists of the Birnbaum-Halliday study, and we hope they will try our new soft drink."

Coke, after nearly twelve decades in business, is closing its doors. Coke cited as reasons for this the failure of its many CokeLand shops, and Pepsi's growing dominance in the increasingly important field of specialty colas. Although Coke triumphed steadily in one area—that of its Double-Diet No-Vanilla Neapolitan Okay-Some-Vanilla Cherry Coke—profits from that beverage were insufficient to counterbalance Pepsi's considerable gains. (In the past year, Pepsi has seen record sales from its Caffeine-Blast Pepsi Wintergreen, Pepsi 18-34, and Cool-Ranch Pepsi varieties.) "We congratulate Pepsi," a Coke spokesperson said. "Pepsi won this. It was a tough fight. More power to them, I say." ♦

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LIFE AND LETTERS

RABBLE-ROUSER

When Westbrook Pegler wrote a column, nobody was safe.

BY WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

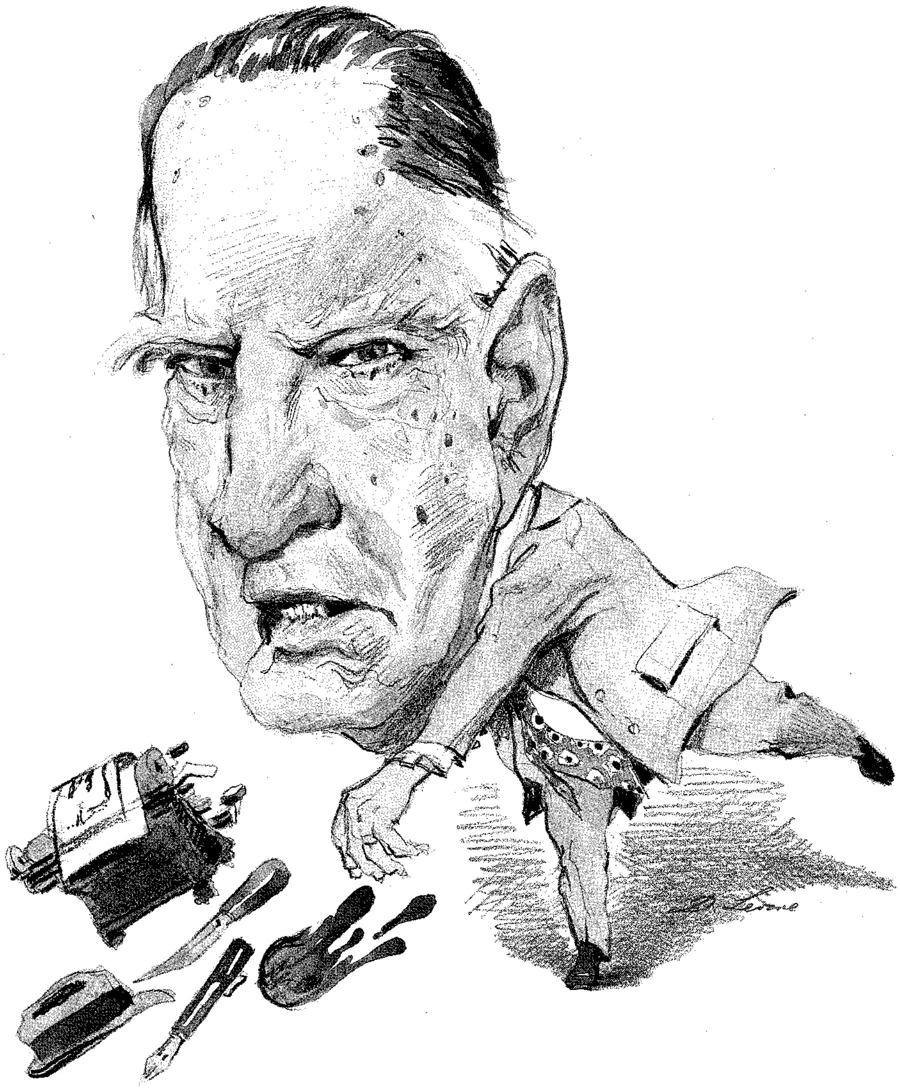
I mentioned his name recently, apropos a recent book on F.D.R., and got back: "Westbrook Pegler? Who is he?" I was speaking with Roger Kimball, an author who is encyclopedically informed. On the other hand, Kimball, the managing editor of the *New Criterion*, is only fifty years old. Westbrook Pegler died in 1969, leaving no major work, and is only slightly noticed in the standard references. In the National Archives Learning Curve, one sentence (the philosophy professor Irwin Edman is quoted) sums up the accepted Pegler legacy: "Pegler's main targets were the 'Roosevelt family and all their works and days, all labor leaders, all intellectuals, poets, and radicals.'" The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, in West Branch, Iowa, stocks the Pegler archives, donated to it by his widow, Maude. (Pegler was childless; his third wife survived him.) It is superbly organized, stretches sixty-two linear feet, and contains ("approximately") 44,500 items. Turning to the Internet, one finds "An Interview with Murray Kempton," which proves to be a broken link. And "a picture of Pegler's grave" and one or two other points of interest.

Some who remember Pegler's singular invective think of him as simply another actor of his age, one more of the unbound journalists who hammered home their complaints and objurgations, breathing out vitriol, unhampered by the least inhibition of political correctness. A. J. Liebling once wrote in *The New Yorker* of "Pegler's Rhadamanthine face, with eyebrows fiercer than Hussars' mustaches. . . . He is the kind of writer who depends a lot on mugging, and when you take his face away, it is like stealing every third predicate."

It is true that in the period Pegler wrote his columns (1933-62) the language of journalists tended to be lustier than today's. Pegler was sui generis, the unschooled cousin of his contemporary H. L. Mencken, who didn't attend college but was soon translating Nietzsche. Yet I'd guess a rediscovery will happen, and that, while scholars will dutifully record the enemy (Wilson, Coolidge, Wallace, Roosevelt), literary pleasure seekers will care not at all about what were his prejudices, no more than readers of "The Dunciad" care who it was, exactly, who annoyed Alexander Pope.

James Westbrook Pegler was born in Minneapolis in 1894, a willful son of a straitened, itinerant journalist. After eighteen months of prep school (Loyola Academy, Chicago), he set out, in 1916, as a war correspondent on the European staff of the United Press. His temperamental impiety was soon evident. In France, he observed what he thought was a gross act of disciplinary excess by Commanding General John J. Pershing. "Many of these boys and their captain," he wrote of the chastised company, "may have died in battle within the next year. If they died forgiving Pershing, they let me down."

He did a brief stint in the Navy, where he served as a clerk; after that came sportswriting for the United Press and the Chicago *Tribune*. Even as a young sportswriter, Pegler attracted the attention of acclaimed and observant writers, including Edna St. Vincent Millay. Carl Sandburg (quoted by the Pegler biographer Finis Farr) wrote to him, "I have told my publisher, Alfred Harcourt, that you may go big in the literary racket some day,



Pegler took on trade unionists, the Roosevelts, and "swanky thinkers."

having a keen eye, and wide curves." According to another Pegler biographer, Oliver Pilat, the author and screenwriter Ben Hecht wrote of Pegler, retrospectively, "He slipped occasionally, for he fought on muddy grounds. . . . But when he finishes his stint and the editorial shears take him over, he will emerge as one of the brightest of the prose lighthouses in a time darkened by the pall of government."

That decade of journalism led to a syndicated column of general commentary for Scripps-Howard, under the patronage of Roy Howard, who acclaimed him a writer whose work showed "the drollery of Ring Lardner, the iconoclasm of Henry Mencken, the homely insight of Will Rogers."

Back then, Pegler had no observable political bias. He had voted for F.D.R. in 1936, though with caution—Roosevelt being President, he was ex officio suspect as a person who exercised authority. The two men met soon after the new President's Inauguration, in 1933. F.D.R. was princely. Cigarette holder aloft, he sought colloquialness with his visitor, and addressed him by a reasonable nickname. But it was one that Pegler had never heard from the lips of anyone else, family, schoolmates, or friends. Gesturing with his cigarette, the President had said, "Now look, West—"

"*What was that, Frank?*"

But Pegler was not yet a political opponent. Some years after his meeting in the White House, he would write of Eleanor Roosevelt that her column ("My Day") marked "another routine day in the life of one who is [only] stingily described as the 'most remarkable' and 'most energetic' woman of her time." She deserved more than that, Pegler insisted. "I think we can take the wraps off and call her the greatest American woman, because there is no other who works as hard or knows the lowdown truth about her people and the troubles in their hearts as well as she does."

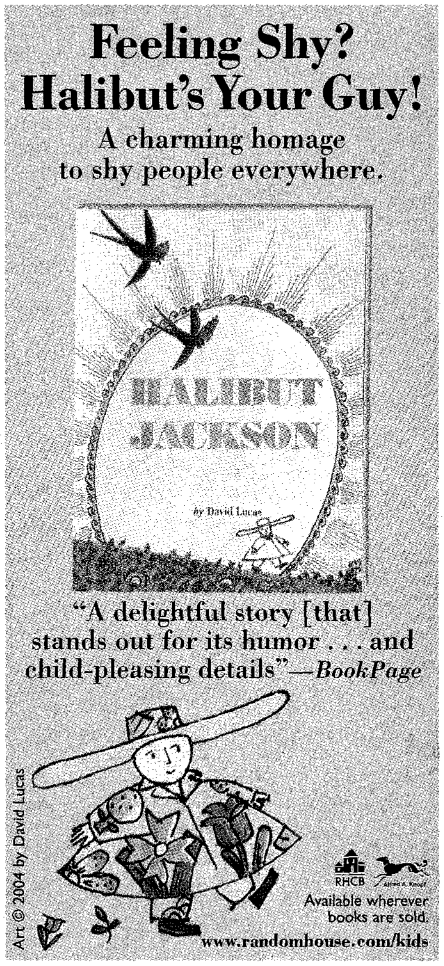
That was 1938. His political leanings now crystallized. His opposition to Roosevelt's domestic policies, to the rise of militant labor unions, and to what he deemed duplicity in foreign policy took him over, and very soon scorn and derision absorbed him completely on the matter of both Roosevelts. Pegler was (understandably) aghast when, soon after Pearl Harbor, Mrs. Roosevelt opined that things would improve "if we were all drafted and told what to do." Only then, she explained, could we get "the maximum service out of our citizens," inasmuch as a higher authority would be there "to tell us where we can be most useful and where our work is needed." He descended on her as "La Boca Grande" (married to "Old Moosejaw"). There are ten boxes at Hoover of Pegleriana devoted to Mrs. Roosevelt and her husband, if they have not gone up in smoke.

Pegler's attacks on the European Fascists had been full-throated. On having news of Hitler's Kristallnacht persecution, he wrote a memorable parable on how the peoples of the world first destroyed all the Jews, and then continued the slaughter, killing off one another until "it ended with just two survivors, a man and an old woman in a tent. He was one-eighth freckled, that is to say, he had a few small freckles. She was of the pure, non-freckled strain. So one night she slugged him with an ax as he slept and fell dead from the poison he had put in her soup that evening. And the horses and the asses romped in the field, never again to be overburdened; deer walked in the open, unafraid of being shot by men; rabbits and birds took courage, cities mouldered and the world was purified of cruelty, dishonesty, truckling and greed."

After the war, in 1949, he spoke of having heard "the reptilian hiss of anti-Semitism," yet five years later, after he was humiliated at the hands of the lawyer Louis Nizer, anti-Semitism set in obsessively. Pegler had charged the journalist Quentin Reynolds with lying, with physical cowardice, and with immorality. Nizer, on behalf of Reynolds, had cross-examined Pegler remorselessly in a famous libel action that was later dramatized on Broadway. After deliberating for thirteen hours, the jury found against Pegler (who was certainly guilty) and hit him with the largest punitive damages ($175,000) in court history. Nizer was Jewish, and Pegler, who became obsessed with the case, interpreted what had happened as the Jewish world vs. Pegler.

During the World War, Roy Howard had been restive with Pegler's offensiveness. When he hired Pegler, in 1933, he told him exuberantly to "write the way you have been writing—only more so." Now Howard had been counselling him

DAVID LEVINE



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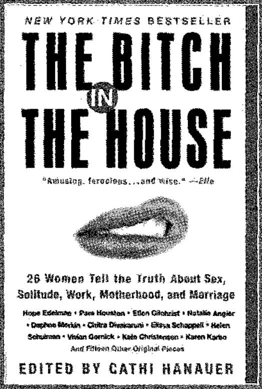
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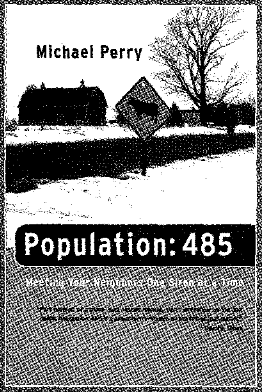

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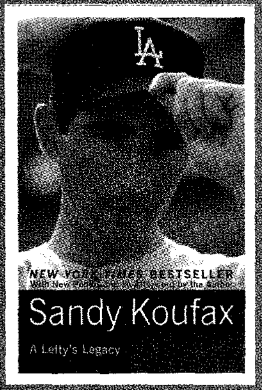

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to go for a change of pace: "There are a lot of good Christians who don't want to be saved every day in the week." Pegler did let off steam, in columns featuring "George Spelvin, American," a fictional figure whom he beckoned to opine on problems domestic and foreign. His common man was dogged, funny, marginally literate, and shrewdly skeptical. (In *The New Yorker*, Liebling tended to see Pegler as rather an anti-common man; Howard, he wrote in August of 1941, "found in Pegler one who sympathized with his belief that ignorance is an endearing quality.") But Pegler was organically out of step with the *World-Telegram*, his sponsoring paper. Howard visited David Dubinsky, the powerful New York labor leader, wondering why Howard's liberal newspaper hadn't gotten a better circulation in the labor field. How might he get it? "That's easy," Dubinsky said. "Fire Pegler."

Howard's impatience came to a head in 1944. Pegler published a virulent criticism of Frank Knox, who (coincidentally) died the following day. Knox had run for Vice-President on the Alfred Landon ticket in 1936, and now served as a Republican member of President Roosevelt's war cabinet (he was Secretary of the Navy). Knox was also the publisher of the Chicago *Daily News*, a heavy client of Scripps, which cancelled Pegler's column. Roy Howard then terminated the contract. Undismayed, and with over a hundred newspaper clients in sight, Pegler moved over to Hearst's King Features, which had been courting him. King Features launched Pegler as "the most influential and widely read journalist in the country." The syndicate honored him at its annual Banshees luncheon, with more than a thousand guests. Bob Hope spoke: "I consider Pegler my friend! He must be my friend, because he doesn't mention me in his column."

Pegler continued in the mode he had practiced for decades, ever on the prowl for people who caught his censorious attention. They were, almost without exception, people who had power or standing. Pegler's derogations of the Roosevelts made for much better reading than his early praise. Heywood Broun, columnist and left activist, was a target. He had known the private Pegler and experienced now the regular wrath of the public Pegler. He wrote, "The tragedy of J. Westbrook Pegler consists of the fact that by nature he is not the man he pretends to be. His native sympathies are wide and deep. When he is aroused about some ancient wrong he can be more eloquent than any newspaper man I know." But Broun was the founding patron in New York of the Newspaper Guild, and Pegler was in perpetual war against any labor union that was restrictive. Pegler denounced Broun, a socialist, as soft on Communism, and when the union voted in a closed shop Pegler angrily resigned his own membership.

Excoriation brought on exercises in high polemical art. Early in his tenure as a columnist, Pegler had spoken to his readers of his ornery disposition: "My hates [have] always occupied my mind much more actively than my friendships. Of friends I will venture to say that I have had a few, but the wish to favor a friend is not so active as the instinct to [disparage]. I think I would go much further" castigating than "remind[ing] a friend, for no particular reason, that I was thinking of him and to advise him that I was sending him a ham." But his animosities got out of hand.

Murray Kempton, who never permitted his own views to stand in the way of friendship or admiration, wrote of Pegler that he "was the common man with a grievance . . . one of the few American workingmen who have heroically and stubbornly struggled to remain class conscious." Pegler, in an early column, had written, "I claim authority to speak for the rabble because I am a member of the rabble in good standing."

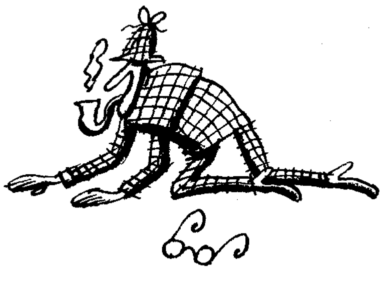
He had a lumbering way in his walk; his face was large and heavy, a touch of gray in his sideburns, the smile slow to form on a resolute mouth. Pegler was by nature on the side of the workingman, and his critics in left field were for that reason slow to arouse. Pegler's concern for the unprotected was clearly that of someone who had himself experienced hardship. This he had done as the son of a journalist who eked out life by overtime work, ending his career in New York in his seventies, after thirty years' work for Hearst newspapers, with a retirement check for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Pegler was adroit at milking disparities. On one trip to Florida, during Prohibition, he kept company, perforce, with rich Northern vacationers. He took stentorian note of upper-class self-indulgence. When the tourist season ended, he wrote:

> The law will be snatching ragged swamp niggers and sallow crackers by the slack of their overalls and tossing them into the state road camps for owning, possessing or transporting pints. The unfortunates will live on grits and fried sowbelly and toil in the jungle, beset by mosquitoes as big as buzzards and goaded by the lowest form of political appointee that crawls upon this earth, the convict gang boss, whose quirt is a thirty-ounce pickhandle.

In another column, he elaborated on his disdain for the ways of the wealthy. The American businessman has accomplished a great deal, yes. However, "he is, in his moments of social relaxation, the most poisonous and vulgar bore on earth, with a penchant for incoherent oratory, loaded with the catch words of the hour, stupidly-dirty and aged locker-room jokes, and time-worn songs, drunkenly done." He looked about avidly for well-to-do or influential figures he judged equivocal in their attitudes toward Soviet Communism. Sometimes his targets shot back. Clifton Fadiman, learned and ubiquitous literary lion and sometime book critic for *The New Yorker*, Pegler scored as soft on Communism. Fadiman responded that if he had an extra hundred thousand dollars in insurance, sufficient to provide for his family, he would walk across town and kill Pegler and go willingly to the chair. Pegler threw up his hands in mock despair. He was dealing, he wrote wryly, with "killer Fadiman, the Union Square quarterback and bull-butterfly of the literary teas." Pegler continued to amuse Liebling; after Pegler wrote despairingly of the results of the 1948 elections (under the headline "ELECTION RESULTS CALLED END OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC"), Liebling wrote, "I imagine Pegler will presently be shopping around for a country with a future."

Some of Pegler's exaggeration effected fine humor. In 1952, he supported Senator Robert Taft against General Dwight D. Eisenhower in the competition for the Republican Presidential nomination. Pegler bit off prominent Eisenhower backers one after another. Winthrop Aldrich, chairman of the Chase National Bank, was the chief financial backer of the Eisenhower campaign. Forget Aldrich, Pegler advised: He is "so old that he could stand on his head until he died." (Aldrich was sixty-six.) The Supreme Court of the fifties was a running target. Pegler showed his rawest side in a personal letter to Chief Justice Warren. The casus belli was a court decision dismissing the complaint of a woman protesting, on constitutional grounds, the law requiring that she withhold taxes from the wages of her domestic servants:



> This is a damned outrage, the worse because you bums know damned well that you could not possibly frame a decision on the issues which would confront you which could reconcile this law with the Constitution. You are the lousiest supreme court in the history of the court and laziness is only your second worst fault. Dishonesty comes first.

In President Truman's abusive letter to the music critic who wrote disparagingly of Margaret Truman's singing, Truman ended by saying, "Pegler, a guttersnipe, is a gentleman alongside you. I hope you'll accept that statement as a worse insult than a reflection on your ancestry."

Yet Pegler could write about the Supreme Court without rant, infusing, even, a twin perspective, at once skeptical and reverential. After taking in the Court's majestic quarters on a trip to Washington, he permitted himself True Awe, however fleeting. He described the Justices' building as "extravagant in its cold and stately vanity," and went on:

> There are solid marble pillars as big as the stacks of an ocean boat, and white marble benches like those in a stylish graveyard, where no one sits because it wouldn't seem right. . . . There is plush enough for an old-fashioned Keith-Orpheum, and even in the big marble lobby the tourists speak instinctively in whispers, as at Washington's grave, and the men snatch off their hats and wear a look of uncomprehending awe.

But then the iconoclast, to the rescue:

> It does give a man a feeling that justice speaks out of a cloud and an almost irresistible impulse to purse the lips and blow a rude and impudent raspberry, just to see whether the clergy were well informed about the hereafter or merely speaking from hear-

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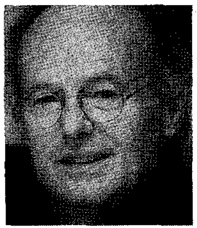

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> say. For surely that would be the end of the world, and the building would vanish in a puff of dust and all present would stand naked and embarrassed before the judgment seat.

Pegler's brute vernacular was fuelled by a distrust of authority, but also by a lifelong sense of inferiority, probably tracing to a slight formal education. "*All those educated men out there . . .*" He handled his exclusion by ridicule, though here and there was wistfulness. Pegler knew—one could see—that he had been hasty and irresponsible in applauding, in 1933, the lynching of two (white) men in San Jose, California, accused of a brutal kidnap murder. They had been yanked out of jail by a mob and strung up. But Pegler's dalliance with self-reproach quickly became submerged in his defiant reflections on the intensity of the criticism that had been levelled at him: "All the coffee-room philosophers and shaggy thinkers of the butchers' paper magazines dusted off their big foreign words, and all the flat-heeled intellects of the female auxiliary came storming down the street heaving bricks of indignation and scorn." As usual, he mulcted any hypocrisy in sight: "The high note of their cry was the sanctity of the law, orderly procedure, and the disruptive force of lawless action, although most of them had been drunk often enough on illegal hooch during prohibition."

However soothed by his own rhetorical countercharge, he had clearly been hurt. And however his critics rejoiced at his setbacks, somehow Pegler-down-for-the-count, acknowledging obliquely the chastisement, managed to evoke compassion: "I was a long time combing the mortar and shattered bottle glass out of my hair, and I still wear some of the knobs they raised."

His formally exiguous credentials he would confess to by scorning others:

> Some of the stylish, custom thinkers who work over each thought with extreme care, often spending weeks on a single lovely little job of ratiocination, think that I think trash, but I don't care to go that far. I admit I don't ratiocinate. It takes too much time, and I have to turn it out six days a week, including some days when the raw materials aren't very good and the mechanism is creaky.

He sometimes succeeded in appearing forlorn at the expense of those he was mimicking:

> Sometimes, just to keep up on things, I read some of the swanky thinkers. You have to do that occasionally. I press my nose against the pane to see what Walter Lippmann is thinking, or Jimmy Sheean, or old man Villard, who is a progressive but keeps the same old carved black walnut intellectual fixtures and high ceilings generation after generation, and would be insulted if you asked him to think up something about a big heavyweight fight just to catch the trade.

Who was Villard? But it doesn't really matter, does it, when reading Pegler?

He charged into fortresses of the highbrows with high cunning. One such redoubt was modern poetry: "Not many of my readers suspect that, in addition to my well-known knack of expressing petty irritation in terms of high-sounding, moralistic scorn, I possess also an ability to create poetry of great confusion and charm."

He gave his readers two poems, the first titled "Night Over Yugoslavia." It began,

> Let cravens crawl when the bugles call
> And war clouds lower near;
> Let vultures fly in the tumbling sky,
> What know the brave of fear?

Three stanzas followed, and then Pegler's comment on them: "Starts nowhere, goes nowhere, means nothing, but resounds in a sort of way. In short, poetry." And he gave his reader lagniappe:

> Last night, in the storm-wrack down
> the glade,
> Where cowslips bloom in the gentle
> shade,
> My soul went wandering, sore afraid
> To drink the wine of fear.

The final stanza of that one, pace Pegler, is worth plain, non-ratiocinative admiration, even in mimicry:

> Oh, say, when in the bosky swale
> The kine are lowing, wan and pale,
> My love sings as the nightingale,
> For you are ever near.

The contract with King Features had less than two years to run when, in August, 1962, the explosion came. Word got out of what Pegler had said at a convention of the Christian Crusade in Tulsa, Oklahoma. That meeting was off the record, but someone in the crowd knew shorthand, used it diligently, and two days later the whole world knew what Pegler had said.

The assembly's host was the Reverend Billy James Hargis. Pegler had no illusions about his host—Dr. Hargis could "whinny-whicker like a country auctioneer selling out a widow on the lawn a week after Paw's funeral." He wanted an audience for a speech that had nothing memorable to say about Christianity and Communism, but was positively electric on the matter of the management team of his employers.

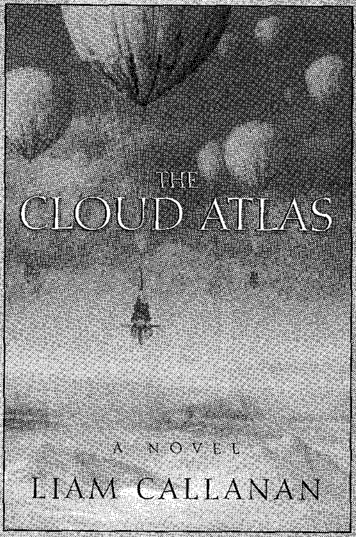
The late William Randolph Hearst, Pegler explained to the assembly, was a "great founding genius." But after his death, in 1951, "control passed to his sons, who lack character, ability, loyalty, and principle." He gave an example of the intrusion of the Hearsts on his own business: "I was forced to suppress a column blasting Pulitzer Prize procedures because after Junior and his Baby Sitters"—Frank Conniff and Kingsbury Smith—"interviewed Khrushchev, Junior immediately set up the petulant howl of a spoiled brat for a Pulitzer award."

Pegler went on to explain to the audience what, exactly, King Features consisted of. King Features was a "subdivision of the Hearst empire dealing in comic books, comic strip books, sweet powders to make soda pop, toys and a very ingenious variety of dingbats for the immature." Murray Kempton remembered that line. A year later, in a review of Oliver Pilat's biography, "Pegler: Angry Man of the Press," he wrote that "the minimum compliment that sentence deserves is that it renders unnecessary, by the act of poetic concentration, every previous essay on mass culture."

That was not quite King Features' view of itself, or of the management of Hearst, Inc., its owners. In deciding to buy up his contract, the Hearst people let it be known that complaints about Pegler had been piling up, and that some editors had been trimming his column, some spiking it. Besides, this was 1962, and the Kennedy family was riding high. Pegler had been cautioned that animadversions on the royal family were not welcome. That, of course, had only stimulated his contrary appetites, indeed giving extra spirit to the chase.

So he was fired. On August 14, 1962, the announcement appeared: "Too many irreconcilable differences on vital matters have existed between the parties to continue a workable relationship."

"Some day I will tell you," he wrote me, "but for now let it be that I spent 18 years in a whore house but never went upstairs." Kempton seemed to understand what Pegler meant by that. He wrote in *The New Republic*, "Pegler dam-



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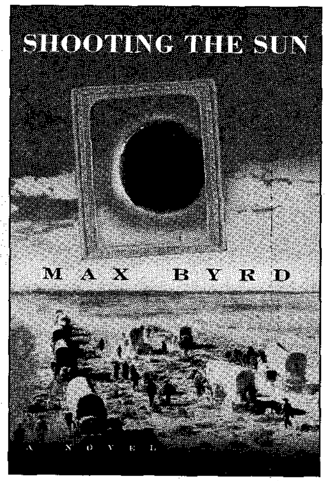

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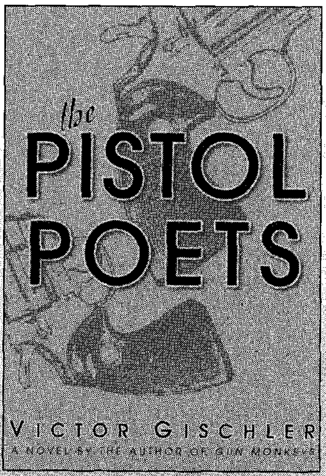

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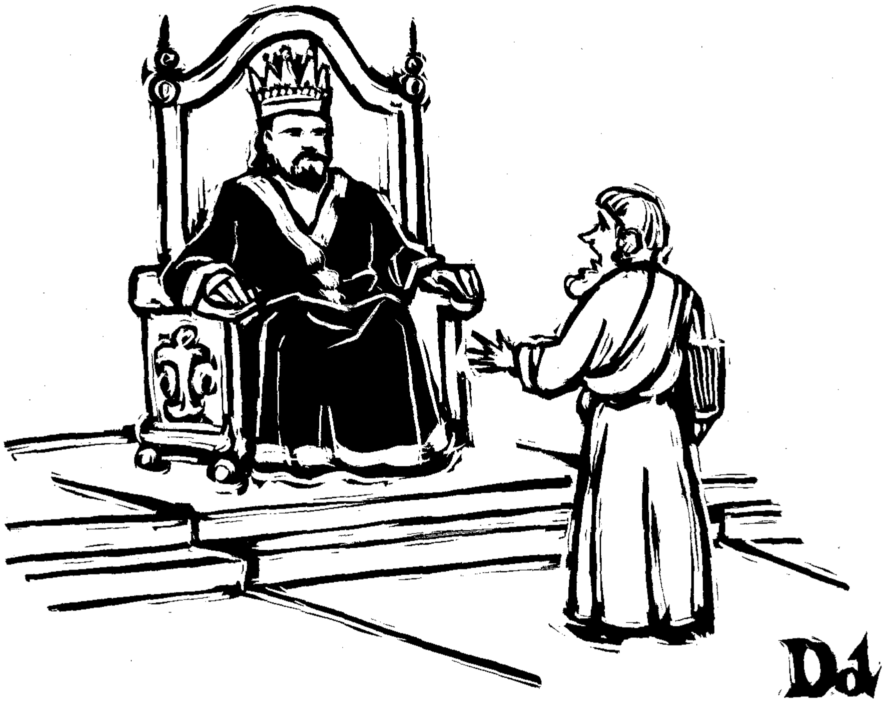

"Eczema is a skin condition, Your Highness. Letting loose the hounds won't make it any better."

• •

aged himself, he wasted himself on what did not matter, but he never told a lie that he had not told himself first."

After his departure from King Features, Pegler was for the first time since the First World War without hard, near-daily writing assignments. He floundered. There was, for a bit, an association with *American Opinion*, the monthly magazine of the John Birch Society. "I have had some words with Bob Welch," he wrote me. "That is, I have had words from him. I wonder whether he is crazy. He wrote me 13 pages of single space a few days ago and he is trying to cut my price in half." But he produced copy irregularly, and the liaison rusted into disuse. It was about then that he wrote to Murray Kempton that his fingers had become too tired to type. That prompted a telephone call from Kempton to me: Pegler should have a party in his honor, a few dozen guests, a convivial atmosphere. Should we act as joint hosts?

I don't remember when Kempton met Pegler. Probably it was at one of the national political conventions that both journalists frequented. I was often there, too, but first met him in New York. I had the idea of collecting some of his work into a book designed to stress his literary skills, and on this subject we conferred once or twice in his apartment; and he knew me, among other things, as a friend and admirer of Kempton.

I agreed to the idea of a party, and I had a conversation with Maude Towart Pegler. Mrs. Pegler, keeping house in Tucson, had been her husband's secretary for many years. She married Pegler after his brief and stormy second marriage, which came soon after the death of his first wife, Julia, with whom he had lived for thirty-three years. Maude, living in their house in Arizona, thought the party a fine idea and cleared the date of May 20, 1963. She agreed that it would work best as a surprise, but advised us to check with her before inviting a prospective guest. "There are a lot of people Peg wouldn't want to see at any party for him," she said. Kempton and I would laugh about it as, in the week or two ahead, Maude vetoed, over the phone, one after another nominated guest.

We put the party arrangements in the hands of my sister Maureen, who was then twenty-nine and had just become a mother. Maureen took on special enterprises for *National Review*, where she had worked until her marriage. She booked the underground cave of the Pierre Hotel, dark and cozy and private. After Maude's vetoes, which Maureen was sure were being dictated by her husband, the problem became not how to pare the list but how to fill up the room. At Maude's request, Maureen checked out every detail of the evening with her and Pegler, who by now had been given the news of the party, and at six-thirty Maureen and I picked up Pegler at the Park Lane Hotel, where he had lived, when he was in New York, for almost forty years.

He put his large frame into the station wagon and chatted contentedly in his off-duty, relaxed, non-prosecutorial, even meek mode during the short drive, feigning ignorance of who would be present at the party.

The three tables for eighteen people were adorned with flowers (Maude had told us which he especially favored) and Pegler memorabilia: copies of some of his columns; a reproduction of the Pulitzer Prize award earned in 1941 for a series of articles exposing graft in labor unions; and one or two messages from invitees who were out of town. Kempton and I went over the speaking order with Maureen. We would have remarks from Kempton, something from C. D. Batchelor, a cartoonist for the *Daily News* and himself a Pulitzer Prize winner, from Dan Parker of the *Daily Mirror*, and from me. Pegler would then acknowledge the evening.

Two wines were served, the buzz in the carpeted urban igloo was animated, and during the candlelit meal Pegler told stories to Mrs. Kempton on his right, and to my wife on his left. The speakers were warm in their reminiscences and respect, and when it came to hearing from Pegler the applause was profoundly tender. He rose to speak with some difficulty, and then he leaned over and passed out. Demon rum. Maureen and Murray took him home.

I have no record of any letter from him bearing on the evening, but when my sister suddenly died a few years later, in 1967, he read the obituary I had written in *National Review* and wrote to me, "Your beautiful telling of the sad news assuaged the hurt of it, but I feel a great sorrow in my veins. I have had 70 years now, more than I expected, and I don't enjoy living in this bad bitter world, and would spare some years retroactively for someone as sweet and worthy as Maureen. God love and rest her."

That same year, Kempton wrote extensively, in *The New Republic*, about Pegler's odd integrity, pausing to recall that for young journalists "to have met Westbrook Pegler was to have been surprised at how gentle he was, and how glad to see you."

So it must have been, Kempton went on to reflect, for Tristan, of the Round Table, who "I suppose would have been like that when he met young men in the fit of first love and swearing that they would live no other way." But then they "would go off" and lose the muse that once guided them, "and Tristan would sit there, still held by that old potion, and he would hate them and quite properly too." What Kempton was saying was that a stubborn fidelity for his craft set Pegler apart, and that his art was there, is there, for those he wrote for, or who are still curious.

Kempton added a "postscriptum" to his *New Republic* essay:

> [As Acton said,] there is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. Just to have learned that much and to have been given a fanatic heart are all you need to get through life. Yet Peg, more than anyone I ever knew, had that knowledge and that heart and those of us who cherished him, not just as a writer but as a person, are thought to be whimsical when we say so, and the young are warned against going his road.
>
> I am sorry. The only argument against Peg's road is its risks, and you affront the young—or ought to—when you advise them against risks.

I came on Kempton at a memorial service for Pegler at an uptown church. The readings from the Gospel were spare, and the worshippers sparer still. The contrast was very sharp with the High Mass funeral for his wife Julie, in 1955, the church crowded with mourners, the organ in full cry as, after the service, Pegler strode, alone, down the aisle to the street with the mien of a Roman senator, deep in grief, proud and resolute in expression.

I drove downtown with Kempton, who drew on his pipe and said, "I knew Peg must have been very sick. I got a seven-page letter from him . . . without a single mention of Ben Gurion!" Pegler would have laughed, as we did. He was long since gone, his burial something of an afterthought, but our grief was real. ♦

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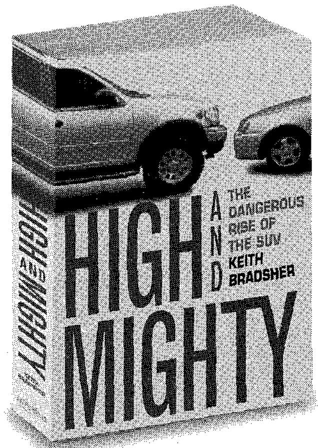

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LETTER FROM ZIMBABWE

THE SOLDIER

What did the war do to the men who fought it?

BY ALEXANDRA FULLER

I first met Benjamin K. in Zambia, one steamy midmorning in late December, 2001. I was drinking tea and reading at a picnic table on my parents' fish and banana farm, on the banks of the Zambezi River, near the Zimbabwe border, when the dogs suddenly scrambled, yelping, up the steps toward the top of the camp. I looked up and there, under an arch trailing with passion-fruit vines, stood the man who had been variously described to me by other local white people as "the new *mazungu* on the block," a "mad bastard," a "tough bugger," "one of the most efficient hunters in the Rhodesian Army," "a bloody Holy Roller," and "the bloke who doesn't drink"—the last of these observations being, at least in this part of Africa, newsworthy in and of itself.

Under the best of circumstances, the whites in the area where my parents live, some hundred miles south of Lusaka, tend to look sweat-drained, malarial, drunk, tragic, and displaced. A scrappy ex-soldier who had washed up here from Zimbabwe would, I thought, look like them, only more so. Instead, K. appeared fresh and well rested, like a warrior ready for battle. At forty-seven, he was a powerful six feet two—not gym-toned muscle but seasoned flesh. He had a wide, spade-shaped face, tanned an olive-brown, and wary eyes that were large and khaki-colored. His lips were full, and he had even, white teeth. He exuded an insistent aura of cleanliness and self-discipline—a difficult thing to pull off in this woolly climate.

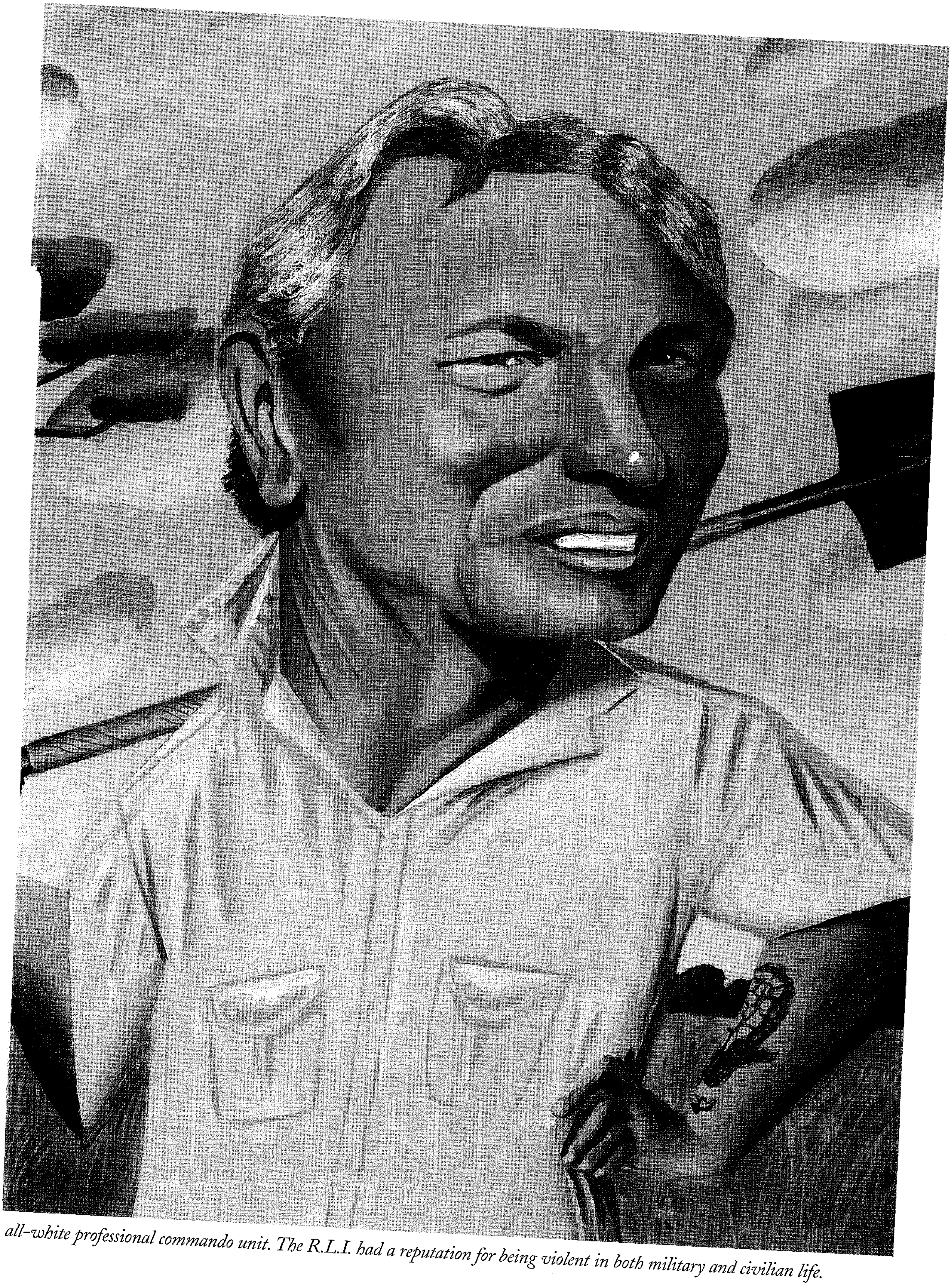
I offered him tea and he settled down in the canvas chair opposite me as if he were preparing for a long siege. K., I quickly discovered, had a habit—born of loneliness, perhaps—of talking at length and tirelessly about everything around him. That morning, he held forth on the subjects of dogs, bananas, fish farming, tea, dental hygiene, the bad road to Lusaka, the rainy season, and the indisputable power of the Almighty. He didn't pause long enough for me to reply to anything he said, and the implication, in any case, was that whatever he said was the last word on any given subject. I didn't mind—I was entertained, and his chatter allowed me to scrutinize his body, which, in some ways, told more stories than his mouth ever could. He had tattoos on both arms: on the left, a cupid and a Viking; on the right, the sword-symbol of the Portuguese paratroopers, the *pára-quedistas*. Above that, his arm was marked with the letters "A POS." The only men I know who have found it necessary to have their blood type scratched indelibly into their limbs in blue ink have been soldiers in African wars. So I waited for a pause in his soliloquy, then remarked, "You were in the war."

"Yes," he agreed. Which was about all I'd expected. Most white men who have fought on the losing side of an African civil war and then decided to stay in Africa are, for obvious reasons, reticent about their experiences. But, in the event, K. proved as talkative about his war as he was about everything else.

The Rhodesian War, which began, more or less, in 1966 and ended in 1979, was a sustained and violent struggle between a white minority, who had power and wanted to hold on to it, and a black majority, who had no power but were supported in their struggle to get it by newly independent African states, as well as by the Soviet Union and its allies. The war was fought on Rhodesian soil as well as in the neighboring countries of Mozambique and Zambia, but, unlike most wars for independence in Africa, both sides—white and black—considered themselves indigenous to the land. White Rhodesians did not view the movement toward black independence as a progressive or, at least, inevitable step; they saw it, rather, as an invasion of enemy forces. As the war dragged on, virtually all able-bodied men between the ages of seventeen and sixty, both

K. served with the Rhodesian Light Infant

MARK ULRIKSEN



all-white professional commando unit. The R.L.I. had a reputation for being violent in both military and civilian life.

white and "colored" (the Rhodesian term for people of mixed blood), were called up to fight the "Communist terrorist insurgents"; Rhodesia's Army Chief of Staff for Administration, Derry MacIntyre, even argued (unsuccessfully) in favor of the Israeli model—mobilizing both sexes for armed service. "Because we're all Rhodesian and we'll fight through thick and thin," the white Rhodesians sang, "we'll keep this land a free land, stop the enemy coming in."

K. told me that he'd served in the Rhodesian Light Infantry. Unlike the other divisions of the Rhodesian Army—which were composed of both blacks and whites—the R.L.I. was an all-white professional commando unit. More than a quarter of its members were foreigners, covertly recruited from Britain, West Germany, the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Belgium, New Zealand, and South Africa, and they had a reputation for being violent fighters in both military and civilian life. "Don't *naai* with the R.L.I.," kids in Rhodesia used to say. "Don't fuck with the R.L.I."

A silence stretched between K. and me, full of all the things that I thought I knew about him and all the things that he thought I thought I knew about him. And then he said, "*Ja*. Well, that's all old stories now. That's all the past. Dead and buried."

Our second meeting, two or three days later, demonstrated that K.'s past was far from dead; it was buried, in fact, just beneath his skin.

On this occasion, his habitual monologue veered, as the conversation often does in this part of the world, to the subject of parasites. He started with malaria, then moved on to fleas and ticks. Then, suddenly, he seized my finger and led it to a place just under the sharp rise of his right cheekbone.

"Feel that? Can you feel that? Two years ago, I started getting these moving, jumping lumps under my skin." K. pressed my finger deeper into his flesh. "There. See?"

I nodded.

"What do you think that is?"

"*Putsis*?" I said, thinking of the eggs that are laid under the skin by flies and emerge later as maggots.

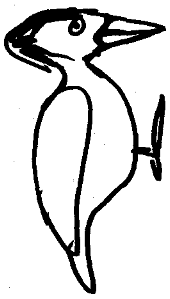
He shook his head and pressed his lips together victoriously.

"Worms?"

"Wrong again," K. said.

"Pimple," I said. "I don't know. Boil, welt, carbuncle, locust."

K. stared at me unsmiling. He said, "It was a couple of years ago. I had just rescued this kitten—it was the rainy season, and you know how these poor bloody kittens just wash up on the side of the road like drowned rats? Well, about a week later, these bumps started appearing everywhere. I thought I'd caught worms off the kitten, so I ate deworming pills. Nothing. Except I got the trots. So then I soaked both of us in dog dip and I bloody nearly killed the poor kitten, but these lumps were still hassling me. So then I bathed in twenty litres of paraffin and my ears bled for a month, but still these lumps kept twitching. I was going *benzi*, I tell you. Then I injected myself twice a day every day for a week with sheep dip, two cc's at a time. I thought maybe I had sheep maggots under my skin. The sheep dip nearly killed me—I was in bed for a week—but the bloody things kept twitching. So I burned my mattress, boiled my clothes, fumigated my bedroom, and cooked my shoes, but still there they were. The doctors gave me tablets that are supposed to kill the worms that these people in West Africa get. I said to the doctor, 'This is Zambia, not bloody West Africa.' Six pills a day. They made me so sick I thought I was going to die. There I was, back in bed, sick as a dog, with twitching lumps. Eventually, I went to a Chinese doctor in Lusaka—Mrs. Ho Ling. She diagnosed me with inflamed nerve endings. It was just nerves," K. concluded. "Too much stress. Too much war."



The events that led to "the War" (as the whites called it) or "the Second Chimurenga" (as the blacks called it, from the Shona word meaning "to struggle" or "to cry out") had been piling up with tragic inevitability for nearly a hundred years: the issue of land distribution rested on the issue of racial discrimination, which in turn balanced on the issues of segregation and one man one vote, until the whole house of cards toppled with more than ordinary violence.

The scramble for control over southern Africa had been well under way since the late eighteen-hundreds, with the Boers, the British, the Germans, and the Portuguese all squabbling over the spoils of Africa's largely unexplored interior. In 1889, Cecil John Rhodes, who had amassed millions of pounds as the head and co-founder of the De Beers mining company, secured a royal charter from Queen Victoria to search the land north of the Limpopo River for gold. The following year, under the banner of the British South Africa Company, a mercantile business he'd founded in 1889, Rhodes (who was soon to become the Prime Minister of the Cape Province, in South Africa) dispatched a Pioneer Column—a mixed bag of adventurers, farmers, miners, and police—into Mashonaland, the area that surrounds Harare, the modern-day capital of Zimbabwe. Then, in 1893, whites invaded Matabeleland (the area surrounding Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Bulawayo), where they defeated the Ndebele *izimpi*—or warriors—and expropriated their cattle and land. In 1895, Mashonaland and Matabeleland were united under the name Rhodesia, as a territory that was not a British colony but, rather, a tract of land controlled by the B.S.A.C.

White settlers in Rhodesia were allocated farms of up to twenty-five hundred hectares by the B.S.A.C.; the indigenous blacks were given nothing. Instead, they were exploited as cheap labor and expected to pay their new masters a "hut tax." In 1896, the Africans rose up against the whites in what has become known as the First Chimurenga, but they were subdued within eighteen months. After the First World War, the white settlers of Southern Rhodesia (as the region had become known when the B.S.A.C. extended its control into the area north of the Zambezi River, which became Northern Rhodesia in 1911), increasingly frustrated with B.S.A.C. rule, voted to become a self-governing British colony. By the early sixties, all but a handful of African countries had gained independence, and in 1964 Northern Rhodesia followed suit, becoming, in a largely nonviolent exchange of power, independent Zambia. On November 11, 1965, however, the Southern Rhodesian government, fearing that the British Prime Minister would turn that country over to the Africans, too, made a unilateral declaration of independence, under which whites retained power and black Rhodesians remained disenfranchised.

Britain and the United Nations Security Council responded by imposing economic sanctions on the rogue state, and black Rhodesian nationalists began preparing for war, training in countries that were sympathetic to their cause: Zambia, Ghana, Tanzania, China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union. For a time, the nationalist guerrillas dispatched into Rhodesia were easily captured and killed by government forces; they were, as one white farmer said, "only a pinprick in our sides"—or, as Army Chief of Staff MacIntyre more arrogantly put it, "garden boys." But in 1972 the rebels intensified their war. No longer operating from beyond Rhodesia's borders, they infiltrated the northeast of the country, caching arms and living in and off the local villages. From these bases, they attacked white farmers and intimidated their black laborers; they laid mines and set ambushes. It was in 1972 that K. joined the R.L.I. He was eighteen years old.

I lived on a farm on the Rhodesia-Mozambique border during the war, but I was only eleven when it came to an end. I'd seen my father go off to fight; he hadn't gone far. He'd walked to the end of the driveway and been picked up in a Land Rover and taken with five other farmers to the hills above our house, where they crept about for a couple of weeks hoping not to be noticed by the enemy. "We were just a bunch of bumbling farmers buggering around in the bush," he says. "We were lucky to get out of the war without shooting each other, let alone the bloody gooks." K. was different. In many ways, he was born and bred to be a soldier in the Rhodesian Army. He was white but African, and his upbringing had given him the greatest weapons a white man could have in an African war—a profound understanding of the bush and a profound disdain for black people.

K. was born in Bulawayo on April 26, 1954. His great-great-great-grandfather, an engineer, had left his home on the Belgium-Holland border in the early eighteen-hundreds and moved to India, where K.'s father, Harry, grew up. (For their protection, I have changed the names and details of many of the people mentioned here.) At the end of the Second World War, Harry decamped to South Africa, where he met K.'s mother, Yvette, a South African-born woman whose parents were Afrikaner and Greek. When she was twenty-two and playing on South Africa's field-hockey team, Yvette contracted polio. Crippled for months, she gradually learned to walk again unaided, but she could not get back up if she fell. A determined, stubborn woman, "she wouldn't let a *gondie*"—a derogatory term for blacks—"touch her," K. told me. "If she fell, she'd rather crawl, inch by inch, all day, until she made it back to the house on her own. She was that proud."

The family lived on a cattle and tobacco farm in Kalomo, in the southwestern part of Northern Rhodesia. At six, K. was sent to boarding school in the nearby town of Mazabuka. He was quickly labelled a difficult child. In his first week there, he was "given stripes"—beaten with a leather strap until welts swelled on his buttocks—for insolence. At eight, he was sent to a primarily Jewish school, Milton Junior, in Southern Rhodesia. "They beat the crap out of me," K. said. "There were only a handful of us in the whole school who weren't Jewish, so they picked on us." His experience at Jameson High School was even more savage. When he was fourteen, he was held down by two boys his age while an older boy raped him. "That was it," he said. "I am not saying that being raped damaged me for life or anything, and I have nothing against *moffies*"—an Afrikaans term for homosexuals—"as long as they leave me alone. But I had had enough of being bullied. So I was in the shower one day and the guy—the asshole that raped me—came in and I stepped out of the shower and I punched him. One time. Flat. That's when I realized I knew how to hit. One punch right there"—K. pointed to the tip of his chin—"and then in the *goolies* on the way down, and then a kick to the

CHEERLEADERS FROM ANOTHER PLANET
DON'T STRAIN-YOU COULD PULL SOMETHING!
REMEMBER, THE OTHER TEAM HAS FEELINGS, TOO!
IT'S ONLY A GAME.
R. Chast

head when they're on the floor. That's all it takes."

In 1968, Yvette died of respiratory failure during an operation to repair the tendons in her hands, which had been damaged by years of gripping crutches. K., who was fourteen, was given two days off school to attend his mother's funeral. When he returned, he lost all his body hair. (The hair has grown back on his scalp and eyebrows, but the rest of his body is still almost entirely bald.) Harry, devastated by the loss of his wife, left the family farm in what, by then, had become Zambia and moved to Rhodesia, where he continued to farm, but without enthusiasm. "He was a shell after Mom died," K. told me. "He just seemed to shrink inside himself."

In 1972, K. was drafted into the Rhodesian Army as a regular soldier. His introduction to Army life was not promising. One morning in his first week, a sergeant kicked him in the back because he was slow getting out of bed. K.'s fighting instincts took over, and he pinned the sergeant to the barracks door by his throat. As punishment, K. was ordered to carry his bed, fully made, to breakfast, lunch, and dinner. "I knew I wasn't going to make it in the regulars," he told me. "I mean, I couldn't stand being told what to do by some idiot who had less of a clue than I did. So I signed up as a troopie. I phoned Dad and I said, 'Dad, I've joined the R.L.I.,' and he said, 'If you want to fuck your life up, then go ahead.' "

A few days after I met K., I decided to visit his banana farm, which is an hour or so by car, depending on the state of the roads, from my parents' place. Shortly after six in the morning, I was dropped at the turnoff about seven miles from K.'s farm. It had rained in the night, and the road was red with gluey clay that stuck to the soles of my shoes as I walked. As soon as the sun rose above the edge of the horizon, the air grew languid with the kind of clammy heat that promises worse to come. On either side of me, there were mud-sunk settlements—clusters of huts and thorn-branch kraals—and the salty smell of smoked goat meat mixed with the scent of fresh rain on dry grass. Small mopane flies congregated in the creases in my neck and behind my knees. Children, malnourished and filthy, formed a shouting chorus behind me, practicing their English with triumphant insistence: "How are you? What is your name? Where are you going?"

66
ACME SALES

"Sorry, but I get all the stuff I don't need on the Internet."

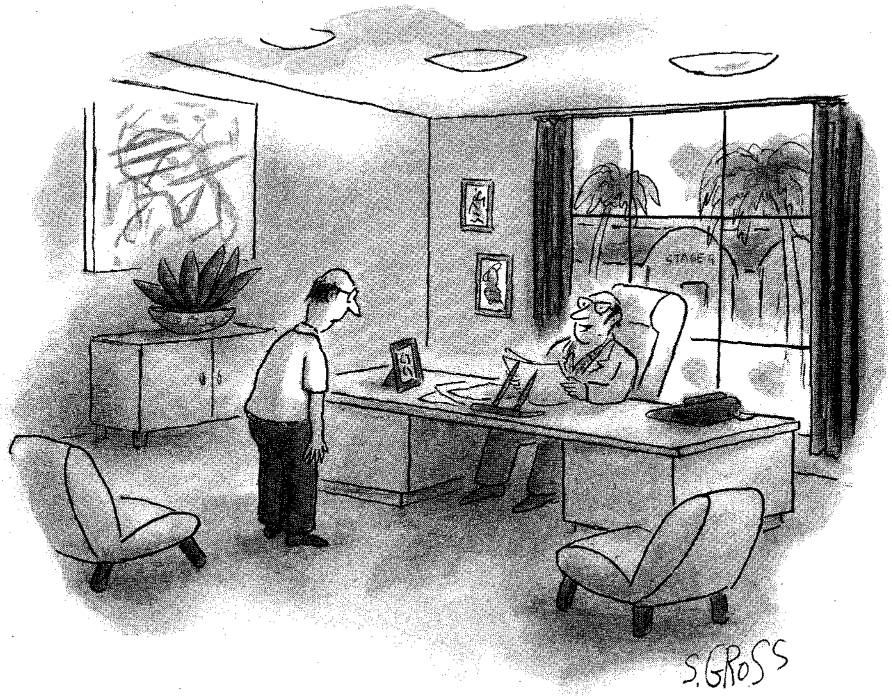
K. had married in 1979, a year after leaving the Army, when he was twenty-five and his wife, Denise, was eighteen. Together, they'd set up a business fishing for kapenta, a sardine-like fish, on the Zimbabwean side of Lake Kariba. In 1990, at a lunch party, their only child, a blond, blue-eyed five-year-old named Luke, said that he had a headache. K. told him to lie down on a towel in the shade. Three hours later, the boy was in a coma with meningitis. Within a week, he was dead. (K.'s father had died of heart failure a few months before.) That was when K. was born again and stopped drinking. "If God gives me another chance—if He sees it within His gift to give me another child—I won't fuck up again," he told me. "I'll bring the child up for His glory."

K.'s marriage soon collapsed. His wife kept the business, and in 1992 K. set off on a slow journey from the top of the Zambezi Gorge, down the Zambezi and Kafue Rivers, in search of a suitable stretch of soil in Zambia on which to grow bananas. (By then, aggressive land reforms in Zimbabwe, under President Robert Mugabe, had made it nearly impossible for K.—a white man—to find a farm in his own country.) After almost two years of searching, he arrived at the Chirundu Valley. K. was chugging down the Kafue River in a speedboat when he noticed a healthy crop of what he calls "turbo cabbage"—marijuana—near the water's edge. He tied up his boat and scrambled up the bank and got his first look at the property that is now his farm. "It was like coming home," he told me. "It was like all my life I had been waiting for my feet to touch this soil. I knew it was mine the moment I saw it. I get down on my knees every day and just praise the Almighty for giving me this land."

Depending on your point of view, you could say that it was, in fact, the local chief who gave—or, rather, leased—K. the land, two hundred acres of previously uncultivated bush. When K. started, there was no road, and the farm was only intermittently accessible by boat (the river levels get both too high and too low). But, with single-minded determination, he gradually built up the farm to where it was when I visited—an impressive factory of a place, neatly arranged within an electric fence (to discourage thieves), lush with fourteen hectares of bananas, and swarming with nearly seventy well-trained workers.

For the people of this region, K. represented perhaps the only chance for employment, medical attention, school, transport, and decent housing. Because AIDS had robbed so many families of their adult providers, some households in the nearby villages were supporting as many as twenty-one members. At the border, less than twenty miles away, girls as young as twelve were selling themselves to the long-haul truckers for a bar of soap or some food. "I teach my *gondies* to do things properly," K. said, steering me toward the house. "With the training I give them, they can get a job anywhere. People do things half-assed here because they think no one's looking. They forget that the Almighty is always watching. Everything I do, I do for His glory. That is why I won't tolerate anything less than the best."

K.'s house was a single cement bedroom with a veranda attached to it, positioned under the arms of a massive tamarind tree and overlooking a bend in the Kafue. The river, churned up by the rain, was the color of milky tea. Three hippos had gathered near the point of an island. Inside the house, the only furniture was a bed, a fan, a chair, and a metal closet. On the walls, K. had hung wildlife prints and photographs of his parents, his niece, and his son. The kitchen was a separate building—open-air and simple. A gas stove and a sink took up most of the front wall, and a shelf held a kettle, a pot, a pan, a few plates and cups.



"Hey, this is brilliant! Where do you get my ideas?"

• •

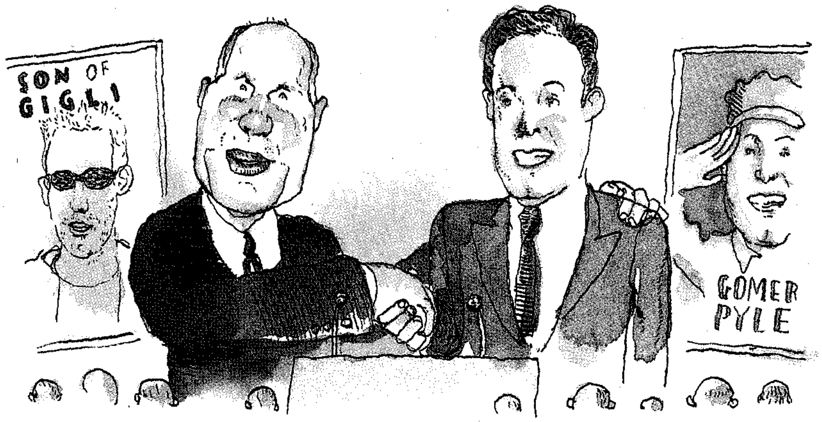
He prepared tea and we sat on the veranda with cups balanced on our laps. He had fried some okra, and we ate it with salt. The air hummed with insects, and drops began to fall, silver beads that pocked the river and drew a curtain of wet around us. We could hear the workers shouting as they ran for shelter. We pulled our chairs up against the house until our knees pressed together in the tight patch of dry protected by the shallow breadth of roof overhanging the veranda. When the rain stopped and I stood up to go, K. said, "I want to show you something." He led me through the farmyard, then cut off, toward the bend in the river, on a path cleared through the bush. Vervet monkeys clattered overhead, and open-billed storks stood sentry in the top reaches of a winter thorn tree. Suddenly, the bush opened up into an expanse of rain-misted lawn. A half-built red brick house stood watch over the river, facing a mountain on the far bank. "That," K. said, pointing across the river, "is Peace Mountain. And this"—he stepped into the roofless structure—"is where we'll live one day. I'll finish building it soon. What do you think?"

"It's lovely," I said, wondering who "we" was.

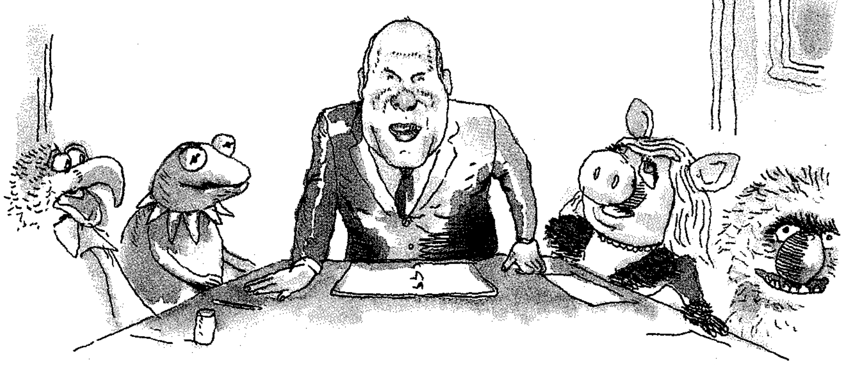
"Look," he said. "It's all set up for books. Shelves here, and here. Maybe you could put ornaments on this shelf. This is the kitchen. See? A view of the mountain out the window." He turned to me, his face transported. "I don't think that God is going to have me make this journey alone," he said. "He will send me a woman when the time is right. She'll have to be a very special woman," he added. "There's been so much destruction. But I've learned so much now. I've really learned about love. I would nurture a woman. I wouldn't have to dominate her. I would put everyone else first. I just want to share this"—he gestured toward the house, the garden, the river—"with someone."

I don't know what it was—the lonely former soldier, his defiance in the face of the odds, the half-built house for the woman who might never arrive—but, to me, K. seemed peculiarly cut off, and not only geographically. I knew that there were others like him, refugees from an ill-advised war, harnessing whatever resources they could to make a life in time of peace, men who had inflicted pain, who had destroyed, who had been destroyed. Men whose words for killing reflected the casualness with which they viewed the act: "scribbled," "culled," "plugged," "slotted," "taken out," "drilled," "wasted," "stonked," "hammered," "snuffed." Men who made

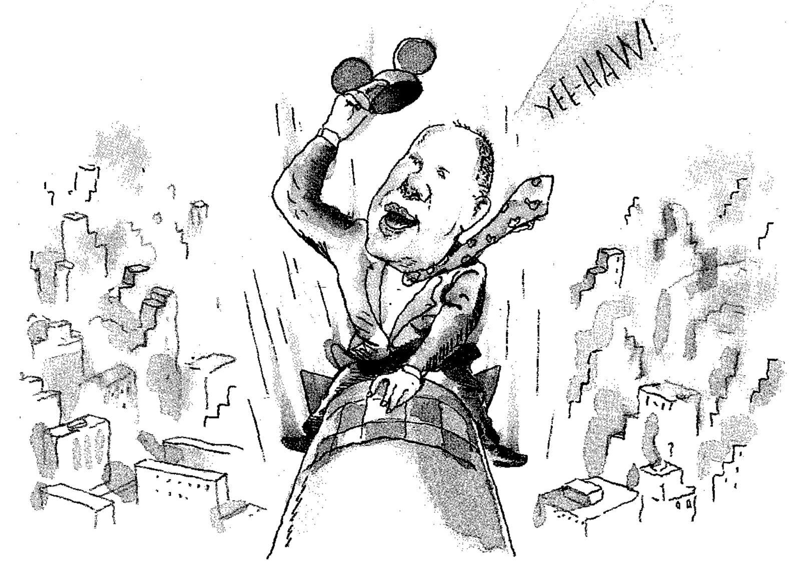
Survival Strategies for Michael Eisner



Makes Disney less attractive takeover target by announcing slate of Ben Affleck films.



Replaces Disney's board of directors.



Acquires nuclear weapon from Pakistan.

BARRY BLITT, ANDY BOROWITZ

nameless the black people against whom they fought by tagging them "munts," "kaffirs," "toeys," "zots," "flatties," "houts," "Affs," "gooks," "terrs," "nigs," "wogs," "woollies." K. was a man who seemed not only scarred by his war but defined by it.

In early February of last year, I met K. in Lusaka. We drove to his farm and filled the back of his pickup truck with food, water, sleeping bags, mosquito nets, and more than a hundred litres of fuel. We planned to drive from Zambia into Zimbabwe and the theatre of K.'s war—the Mt. Darwin area in Zimbabwe, and the Mozambican province of Tete. These were the two areas first infiltrated by the liberation fighters during the war, and they were considered the "hottest" spots for the duration of the struggle. I planned to write about K.'s war. He planned to bury a few skeletons and go fishing.

In the year since I had first been to his farm, K. had planted more bananas and more indigenous trees (he is one of the few people I know who has successfully cultivated baobab trees from seeds), and he had cleared land, on which he intended to plant avocados and mangos. He looked even more robust than I'd remembered him. It turned out that K., who had given up alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana some time earlier, had now forsworn meat, tea, coffee, soft drinks, white flour, and candy. "My body is a temple for the Almighty," he explained, loading peanuts and green peppers into the tin trunk in which we were packing food for our trip.

"And my body is not," I said, adding beer and potato chips.

The next morning, K. briefed his foreman, Michael, a handsome, capable-looking man, on the work that needed to be done on the farm in his absence. "He's a good *gondie*," K. told me. "When I found him, he didn't know much. But he was willing to learn. I taught him everything and he caught on quickly and he showed that he has a head for responsibility. Now, what usually happens around here is that you find a decent *gondie*, you train him, and then the poor bastard gets Henry the Fourth and dies." ("Henry the Fourth" is K.'s euphemism for H.I.V.) "So how do you explain this? Michael can't get a stiffy. I have the only *gondie* in Zambia who can't fuck himself to death. Do you think that's a coincidence? He's sent by God, and he has been protected by God."

I said, "Poor Michael. I am sure he'd rather not be impotent."

"Yes, but if he could get a hard-on he'd be dead by now. What's the average life expectancy in Zambia? Thirty-seven, thirty-eight, if you're lucky." (It is actually thirty-three.) "These poor bastards are dying like chickens."

There is no simple explanation for the way in which the races have come to an uneasy rest in the parts of Africa that I know. It would be disingenuous to pretend that race does not matter, or that it is largely ignored, but in Zambia, where K. lives, segregation occurs more along cultural than racial grounds. Blatant racism is not tolerated (by which I mean that non-blacks found to be disrespectful of blacks are shown their exit papers), but there is still a colonial hangover from the bwana-and-servant class, with most of the bwanas being white and all of the servants being black. When it comes to bigotry, K., at least, does not discriminate. No race or ethnicity escapes his tongue. East Asians are "wagon burners" (a roundabout reference to Indians by way of American Indians) or "chi-chis" (for their accents). Greeks are "Mediterranean *munts*." People of mixed race are "goffles" or "half-'n'-halfs." Britons are "Poms" (an acronym of "Prisoner of Mother England"). Afrikaners are "slopes" (for the way their foreheads are supposed to slant). Portuguese are "Pork and Cheese." And Mozambicans are "Uncle Fire" (for their practice of slash-and-burn agriculture).

We crossed the border into Zimbabwe and travelled through the countryside on the almost empty road that branches northeast from Harare to Mozambique. Recent political violence (Mugabe has, with increasing disregard for international censure, undertaken a policy of brutal, systematic oppression of his opponents), a drought, and fuel shortages had turned the people of the region into despondent crowds that clustered near food-aid drops and under the shade of tavern verandas. The towns we passed through sounded like words in a song: Murewa, Mutoko, Nyamapanda. The windows of the pickup were rolled down because, like everyone else in this part of the world, we were trying to conserve fuel. Air-conditioning would have been an unpardonable self-indulgence.

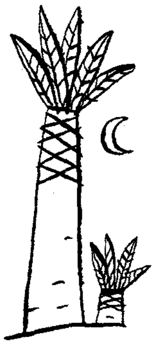
K. had gone quiet and his jaw had begun to bulge. "Do you smell that?" he asked me more than once and looked over as if expecting to see on my face the same shocked look that he wore on his own. I could smell sun heating the rocks; I could smell goats, woodsmoke, and burned chicken feathers. But what I was smelling was not what K. was smelling. It was his first trip back to the area in more than twenty-five years—since he had been decommissioned. I was smelling now; he was smelling the past.

"I know what fear smells like. Have you smelled it?" he continued, as he drove. "It's unmistakable, hey? All fear is—it's the smell of discharged adrenaline. You know that rush you get when the first shot is fired and you think, *This is fucking it*, and you wait for that rush, and everything is incredibly slowed down?

"That's what makes a good leader. Knowing when that rush has hit. If you leave it too long, then the rush is over, the adrenaline has turned to fear, and then all you get is a bunch of kids with shit in their pants, but if you time it right then the whole lot of you get up out of cover, '*Arghhhh!*' And you don't feel a fucking thing. You know? You have this noise coming out of your throat and you're not thinking about anything except killing. And I don't mean you want to kill, but it's the opposite of being killed yourself, so you're running straight for the gooks and trying to keep steady enough, and the gun is like this extension of yourself, and you're just trying to slow everything down enough to get a decent shot. And you know what saved us?"

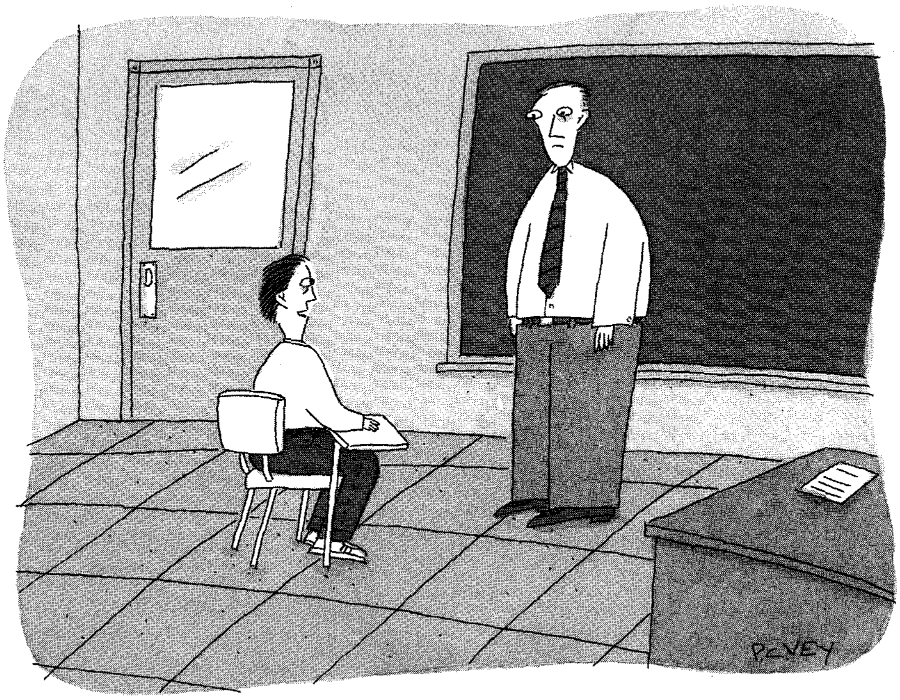
I shook my head.

"*Munts* can't shoot straight. That's what saved us. They had shitty training and they were sent out to the middle of fucking nowhere with half the food and half the equipment we had, and their guns were hopeless. Mind you, a *munt* can go twice as far on half as much as we could. We could maybe make it—what?—three days out there without water. A *munt* could go five. And a *munt* could walk—I've seen one-legged *munts* dragging themselves out of the bush for ten, twelve, eighteen K's. But when it came to a contact—we just blasted them out of the shateen. They didn't have a prayer. We were better trained, better equipped. While they were shooting above our heads, we'd run right up to them. We'd be right there, and they were still fucking around with their safety catches. And then *click*, shoot, *waka*. One time. Dead gook."



According to Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock, in their definitive study, " 'Rhodesians Never Die': The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia 1970-1980," official estimates put the number of war-related deaths on Rhodesian soil between December, 1972, and December, 1979, at more than twenty thousand: 468 white civilians, 1,361 members of the Security Forces (about half of them white), 10,450 "terrorists," and 7,790 black civilians. It is harder to document what Hancock and Godwin call the "longer-term dislocation caused by the war." They quote a former R.L.I. troopie called Chris Cocks, who tells "a sad tale about the fate of his companions after 1980: two committed suicide, one drowned in his own vomit, two were convicted of drug smuggling, one died of natural causes, one joined the Seychelles coup of 1984, one faced an arm amputation and one (himself) had to visit a psychiatrist."

By anyone's definition, K. had a hard war. The R.L.I. troopies were among those on the front lines, taking on guerrilla groups that sometimes outnumbered them by a factor of three or four. For most of his five years of service, K. was based on the northeast border, in the dusty, hot town of Mukumbura, a



"I'm the only survivor from last semester—what do I win?"

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wasteland of sand that the soldiers called, in jest, "Mukumbura-by-the-Sea." From there, he and the men under him were sent on back-to-back, three-week missions into the harsh and hostile terrain of Mozambique and Mt. Darwin to find and destroy guerrilla units and the villagers who were supporting them. At one point, a bazooka exploded in his face. "I couldn't see very well for a while," he told me.

"Did they send you home to recuperate?"

K. stared at me. "I couldn't see very well," he said. "I wasn't blind. No, I stayed in the bush."

He also drove over, and detonated, three land mines. "It got to the point where none of the *ous*"—slang for "men"—"wanted to get in a vehicle with me because I was such a land-mine magnet," he joked, as we drove through a region famous for its abundance of land mines.

For five years, K.'s world was a tiny, self-sufficient island of four or five white men in a land where everything and anything that moved was liable to be the enemy. K. had a talent for fighting and he was a dedicated soldier. He made it from troopie to lance corporal in only nine months—a promotion he won in a characteristic manner. One day, he and his troop were in a particularly dry area of Mozambique, about two days' walk from their last water. K. had made his own supply of water last and he had more than half a bottle left. The sergeant ordered K. to give him some. K. refused.

"This is a direct order. Give me some water."

K. didn't flinch. "If you touch my water," he said, "I will kill you."

The sergeant hesitated.

"If you had said, 'Please,' " K. said, "I might have thought about it."

The sergeant shuffled and looked confused. "Please?" he said at last.

"No, sir."

When they got back to headquarters, the sergeant recommended K. for a promotion. "He's too damned headstrong to keep as a troopie," he said.

Two years later, K. was a sergeant, commanding his own troop.

Bishop Paul Burrough, the Anglican bishop of Mashonaland province from 1968 to 1981, was critical of the behavior of both the Security Forces and the guerrilla fighters during the war and was convinced that the war had brutalized both sides. There is evidence that the guerrillas terrorized villagers, killed alleged "sellouts," murdered innocent families, and desecrated churches; the Security Forces have been blamed for torturing and murdering their prisoners, burning villages, and sexually molesting village women.

I asked K. if he had ever seen a psychologist to help him deal with the effects of his war years. K. snorted derisively. "*Ja.* A couple of times. They're a bunch of bloody monkeys, if you ask me. At the end of the war, I was sent in to see some shrink for half an hour. What's that? Six minutes for every year in the bush, hey? He asked me, 'Do you feel remorse for what you've done?' I said, 'Remorse? No, sir, I was doing my job. I don't feel any remorse.' "

"And the other time?" I asked.

There was a sudden change in K. His hands went tight on the steering wheel, and he looked at me as if I had stung him. Then he rolled up his window and turned on the air-conditioning.

"There was something . . . I haven't talked about this," he said. "There are things that happened in the war that have haunted me." Then he was quiet for a few minutes and he started to cry.

"We were in the Darwin area," he began eventually, and nodded across the valley toward the west, where the mountain was now visible. "We had been sitting up on a kopje all day watching a village. There was a lot of woman activity, which is unusual because it was cropping time. We went down into the village and we went into a hut. There were three women sitting there with three huge pots of food. We asked them, 'Who is this food for?' They said, 'It's for the kids.' But we knew they were lying. It must have been for gooks. You don't find women cooking so much food in the middle of the day for their kids. The middle of the day is when the woman should have been cropping, not cooking." K. continued, "A woman is incredibly resistant to pain and incredibly strong. A man—you can get him to talk by beating him, but women"—he shook his head—"you have to use your psychology. Now, a female *munt* is incredibly modest—they don't like showing their skin." He stopped.

"So you stripped them?" I asked. "As a weapon?"

K. nodded. "It's standard procedure,"

he said. "So the women sitting there—there was an old woman, a mother, and then a young girl. I suppose she must have been sixteen or seventeen. I said to the guys, 'O.K., take her outside. Strip her clothes off and beat her by her breasts and her ribs with a *sadza* stick' "—a stick used to stir the local cornmeal dish—" 'and the soles of her feet and her shoulders.' Also, a *munt* doesn't like water. So you take a T-shirt or something like that and dip it in water and put it over their heads. Then you punch them in the solar plexus and as they suck in their breath they get this wet T-shirt in their mouth and they think they're drowning. So we did that to her." K. sucked in his breath and flailed, grabbing at the air with both hands, miming her response, so that the truck rumbled along unpiloted for a moment.

I must have looked shocked. "This is standard procedure," he repeated. "I left for half an hour and came back. She still hadn't told us where the gooks were. So I told the guys, 'Beat her some more.' We beat her feet and her back some more and then I started to get angry. I told the guys to give me the *sadza* stick and I dipped it in the hot *sadza* and I dripped the *sadza* between her legs. She still didn't talk. So then I said to her, 'If you don't talk, I'll dip this stick in the *sadza* and shove it into you.' She still wouldn't talk. So I scooped up a whole spoon of hot *sadza*." He stopped for a minute.

"Why did I have to do that?" he said eventually, still crying. "I had the knowledge and the skills and the ability to find the gooks. I could have smelled them out. All I had to do was walk out of that village and start walking in ever-increasing circles and I would have found them. But it just made me so mad that she wouldn't talk. That she would defy me like that. It was pure animal rage that she wouldn't coöperate. So I took a spoonful of hot *sadza* and I shoved it into her, you know? And I shoved and kept shoving, and by now she was screaming, so I put more *sadza* in there. And she eventually spoke. She eventually told us where they were, and we went in and we killed eleven of them. Then the helicopters came and I was so busy with body bags and the adrenaline—it's a hell of an adrenaline rush when you have a contact, hey—I forgot about her. I'd wanted to take her into hospital and get her fixed up, but I had been too distracted and she had run into the shateen to hide, and after that we couldn't find her. She died two weeks after, from her injuries. She had got an infection."

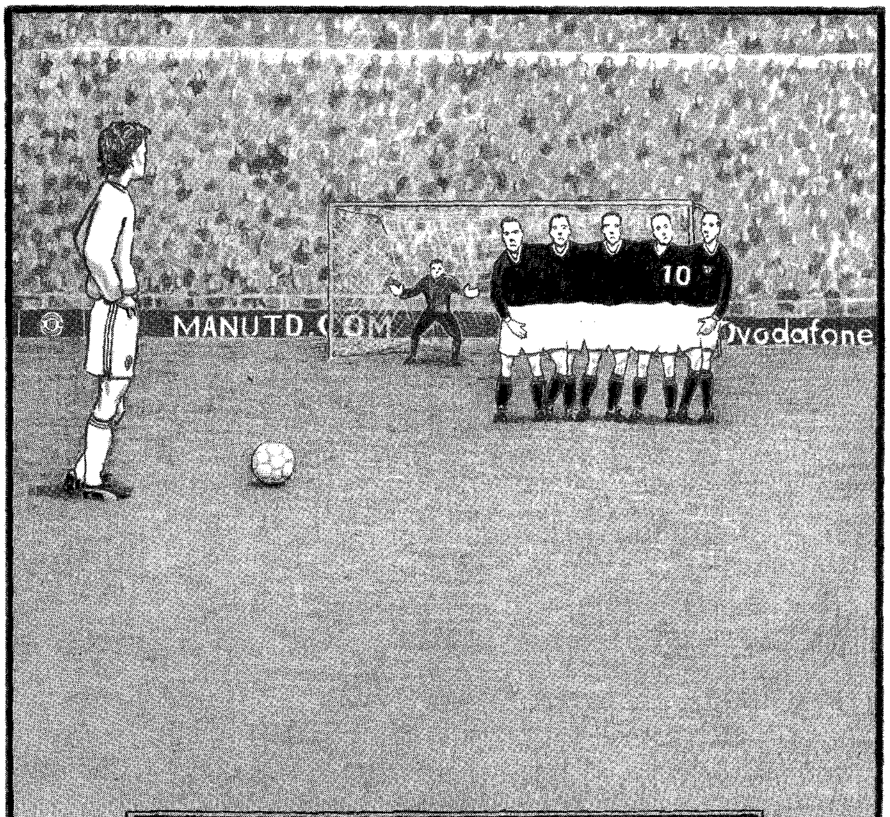
He paused. "I didn't need to do that to her," he said. "I was an animal. An absolute fucking savage. I had been fighting for so long by then, I had seen so much of what these guys did, I was exhausted. But listen to me trying to justify what I did. How can you justify what I did?"

For a moment, I thought of myself in the seventies, as a smug white schoolgirl in Rhodesia. When the troopies dusted past us in their armored lorries, I had waved encouragement at them, a thin arm high in the air in a salute of victory.

K. went on, "So her family had me up on a manslaughter charge. The commanding officer said I needed to plead insanity. For three days, I had to talk to psychologists, and I have never lied so much in my life. That's what the C.O. told me to do. He said I had to sound insane. So I told those stupid, fucking waste-of-time shrinks that I needed to drink blood. That I was hungry for blood. I told them . . . lies. They were such a bunch of fucking wee-wees. They wrote in their books and they asked me questions and they were so scared of being who I was—because they knew that it could easily have been them. Day after day in the bush could send anyone *benzi*. They knew that. And I got off."

K. veered off the road and down a shallow bank, through the scrubby remains of goat-picked grass, until the pickup rocked to a halt in the shade of a stink tree. He switched off the engine. "I have to go for a walk," he said.

We both got out of the car. He walked up into the nearby kopje. I hunched down the way I had been taught as a child, African style, so that my haunches hung between my spread knees. I shuffled my back into the shade of the tree and lit a cigarette to ward off the mopane flies. As I waited,



The McKinsey conjoined quintuplets find their niche.

two boys sidled up to the pickup and stared at me, their bellies pressed out in greeting.

"Where are you going?" the taller of the two asked after he had allowed us a decent amount of time to stare at each other.

"Mozambique," I said.

"You are one?"

"No," I said, "we are two."

The older boy fished at his feet for a dry stalk of grass, which he put to his lips and pretended to light, in imitation of my cigarette. He eyed me sideways, and waved his pretend cigarette at me. "*Fodjga*? Madam? One stick?"

I shook my head. "You're not enough years. How old are you?"

"Ah, come, Mummy!" the boy laughed. "I am many years," and he pointed to his younger companion, of whom he was obviously the guardian.

I dug into the back of the black tin trunk. K.'s green peppers and nuts had fermented into a bubbling brown-green stew. The potato chips and beer had survived.

"Here," I said, sharing the food with them. They tried to pretend that they were not half-starved, and I tried to pretend that this was just an everyday picnic for me. I lit another cigarette. The older child held out his grubby hand again.

I sighed. "O.K.," I said. "Just quit before it kills you." I handed him a cigarette, which he licked and glued jauntily behind his ear.

When K. finally made his way back through the bush, the children had fallen into a half-doze next to the car and I was drinking warm beer. Together, K. and I lifted a container of petrol off the back of the pickup. We made a siphon out of a used water bottle and held it in the lip of the tank with a flicked-open penknife. K. poured twenty litres into the pickup. Then another twenty litres. "I should just swallow this," he said, watching the pink stream of fuel spill into the tank. "Then there'd be one less asshole in the world."

From the Nyamapanda border post through the heart of northwest Mozambique, there was a straight, new road, widely graded on both sides, that had been built with funding from aid organizations. It looked like a gift, hastily bestowed, and incompletely explained. The road signs were too elaborate for the places they pointed to, yet the distances between places were not given. K. couldn't remember how far it was to the next town. "I think we bombed it, anyway," he said, "and if we didn't they did it to themselves."

After Mozambique gained its independence from Portugal, in 1975, the guerrillas who had fought the war there—the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO)—declared themselves Marxist-Leninist and turned to Russia for support. In response, the Rhodesian government created the Mozambique National Resistance (M.N.R., later RENAMO) and set out to destabilize the FRELIMO government, which had supported and harbored black rebels from Rhodesia. The war between FRELIMO and RENAMO—a bizarre accident of empire, independence, and geography—continued until October of 1992. It was not until 1994 that all combatants were demobilized. By then, the conflict had killed almost a million Mozambicans and displaced millions more. The savagery reported on both sides was legendary in scope: rape, torture, murder, sexual slavery, and virtually every possible form of abuse.

The villages we passed now looked haphazard and temporary, places erected out of ruin, with a watchful eye on the next catastrophe. During the war, land mines had been planted not only on the road but at power lines, bridges, railroads, airports, schools, factories, fields, and cattle-dip tanks. When the war ended, there were approximately a million land mines in Mozambique, roughly one for every eighteen people, with the highest concentration in the western province, along the Zimbabwean border, where K. and I were travelling.

"This was all under martial law when I was here," K. said. "All these villagers had to clear out during that time. Some of them went to the cities, or across the borders to Malawi, Rhodesia, and so on, but others went and hid in the shateen. We'd come across their little camps. Just a little bush structure—like a tent made out of branches—and maybe, a mile or two away, you'd find where they had cooked their meal for the day. Then they'd walk miles and miles for their gardens—they'd never sleep close to where they ate or grew their crops. They didn't want to get caught, these poor buggers. They lived like animals that whole time. They were shit scared of us and they were shit scared of the Porks and they were shit scared of the gooks. Imagine! One hundred and ten per cent shit scared morning, noon, and night."

A friend of K.'s in Harare knew a man named Roger Connor, who had a fishing camp on nearby Cabora Bassa Lake and might be willing to let us stay, so we headed in that direction.

I can't remember at what point the straight new tar road we had been travelling on disintegrated into a dirt track, or when that dirt track dissolved into something that looked like a footpath. But we had eventually left all tire tracks behind. Evening fell, and the relative cool of night released into the air the smells of the bush. We drove along in silence for another hour or so. By now, the sunset that had speared through the trees had turned black. The mopane bushes flashed past us, as tall as soldiers, briefly illuminated. Behind us, a plume of dust burned pink in our rear lights.

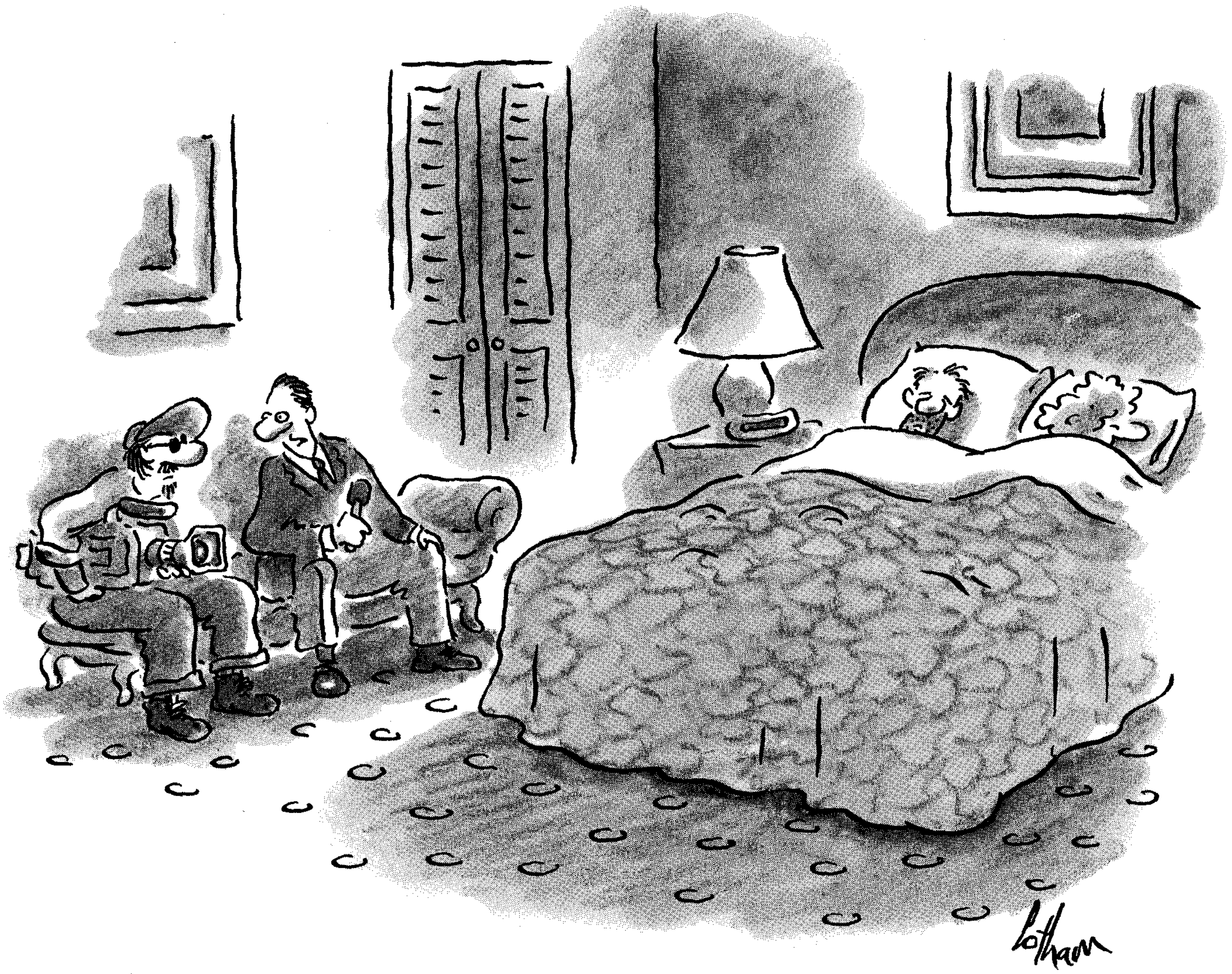
"Do you think we're going in the right general direction?" I asked timidly.

"Of course we are."

"It's just that we don't seem to be getting there."

K. glared at me. "I know this place like the back of my hand," he said. "I've walked all over this land. Shit, I've crawled over half of it on my belly."

We dodged off the footpath and crashed our way down something that resembled a goat track and continued along in this fashion, weaving our way, more or less arbitrarily, it seemed, from one narrow track to the next as trees allowed, for half an hour or so, passing through several villages and, once or twice, narrowly missing a stunned pedestrian or laboring cyclist. Then K. finally stopped and switched off the engine, and into the ticking silence that followed he said, "I have no fucking idea where we are."



"It looks like it's going to be a slow news night."

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Suddenly, out of the darkness, headlights bore down on us. "Roger Connor," a white man said, climbing out of a Land Cruiser and extending his hand. "I got a message that there were two *wazungu* out here and I thought it must be you. Get lost, did you?"

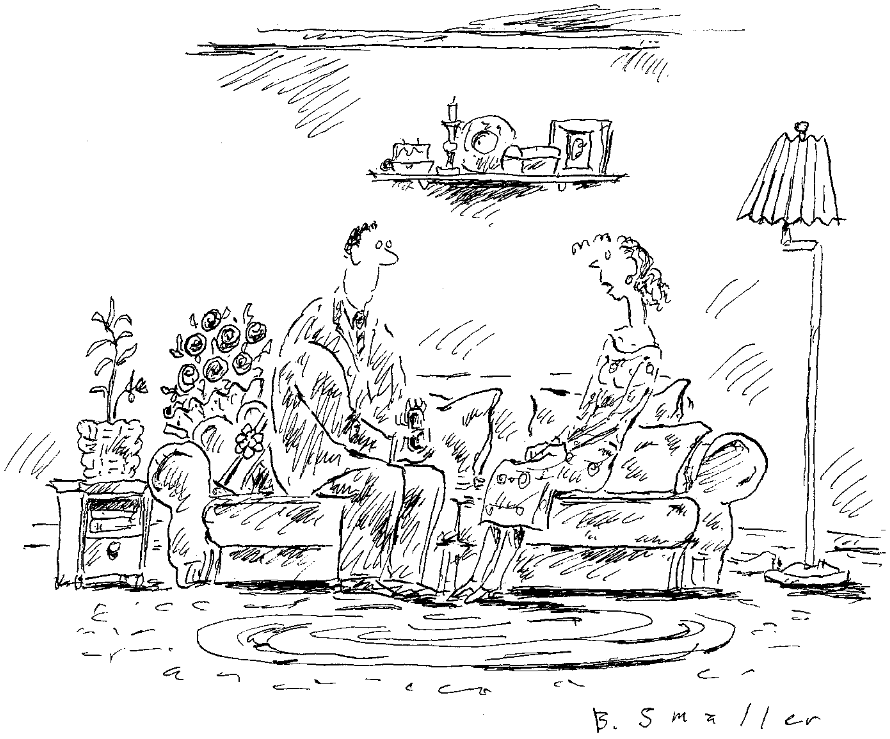
I said, "We've been driving around the lake for hours."

He laughed. "*Ja*, well," he said cheerfully, "good thing I found you before you went off on any of the side roads here. Land mines everywhere. Place is riddled with them."

Connor was an energetic man in his late thirties, with an insistently pragmatic outlook on life. He had moved to Cabora Bassa five years earlier from Zimbabwe and now managed a kapenta-fishing operation. He lived in a tall, dank shed that seemed to trap the heat of the day and turn it, by night, into foul-smelling steam. There were three small guest rooms—cement shacks, really—built around the edge of the lake, and Connor showed me to what was known as the Presidential Suite, because it had a shower and a toilet.

The next morning, we discovered that one of K.'s former fellow-soldiers was living on an island in the lake. "The *munts* call him Mapenga—that's what a crazy bastard he is," Connor said. (*Penga* is the Shona word for "mad.") When we met up with him, Mapenga turned out to be exactly what you'd expect of a crazy man who lives alone on a remote lake in Mozambique. He had a week's growth on his face, a torn shirt, scratches up and down his arms and legs, and a deep, raw tan, blending to red in his neck. When he and K. hugged, thumping each other violently on the back, it looked like a meeting of two gladiators.

Mapenga had been in the Special Branch of the Rhodesian Army during the war. "It's where they sent the clever bastards," he said, cracking open a beer ("breakfast" was what he called it). "The shit we did. Man, if there were a war-crimes tribunal, every damn one of us—from both sides, the *gondies* weren't any better—we'd all be in jail. War is shit." He lit a cigarette and eyed me through the smoke. Then his voice relaxed into a smile. "But war's a gift," he told me. "It's a shit gift. But it's a gift. When I die and I go up there and Jesus Christ asks me what I did with my life, I'll say to him, 'I hope you have a long time to sit and listen, because I have a



"I should let you know I've had multiple bids."

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hell of a story for you!'" Mapenga went on, "We were all mad in that war. That's why we were so fucking good. You'll find we all did shit in school, but we were great at war."

He paused. "You know I got treatment, hey?" he said to K. "Finally, all those years of hurting people and fucking people up and three wives and, man . . . One night, I nearly killed my own brother, and that's when my family said to me, 'Look, either you get help or we won't have anything to do with you.' They diagnosed me with A.D.H.D., and after experimenting with this drug and that drug they put me on Ritalin and I am square now. I am sorted. And I've thought of you often"—Mapenga looked at K.—"because I think you'll find you have the same disease as me. And Saddam Hussein, and George Bush, and bin Laden—all these guys—they all have A.D.H.D. Hitler had it, for sure. You'll most probably find Jesus Christ had A.D.H.D."

K. flinched, and Mapenga leaned forward. "Hey, I heard a rumor you'd gone all happy-clappy now. Is it true?"

K. nodded.

"No shit," Mapenga said softly, "no fucking shit. Hey, I respect that." He lit another cigarette, opened another beer, and laughed. "Cheers, anyway, you mad, miserable bastard."

By the late seventies, the Rhodesian government was finding it more and more difficult to persuade the increasingly weary population that this particularly gruesome and costly war was a viable alternative to black-majority rule. In December, 1979, Britain brokered a ceasefire, which led to all-party elections in 1980. Almost a century after the Pioneer Column had marched into the area around Harare, the indigenous people of that territory were finally granted suffrage. It is a measure of how brainwashed white Rhodesians were that they were shocked to hear, on March 4, 1980, that Robert Mugabe, a leader of one of the guerrilla factions and a Marxist—a man whom many white Rhodesians had never even heard of—had won an absolute majority in the parliamentary elections. As blacks celebrated in the streets of newly independent Zimbabwe, the white residents who had just fought, and lost, a long and bitter war stood by in stunned silence.

As I listened to Mapenga and K. talk about the past, it became clear to me that for them the war had been the easy part. It was what they called the "lost years," after the war, that had been difficult. After the war, K. and Denise had made a good living with their fishing business. K. had built his own house and taken up scuba diving (until an encounter with a crocodile put him off). But he drank in binges, he told me—three weeks of no drinking and then a weekend when he drank steadily. "Voddies-and-Coke was my drink," he told me. "And my demons. *Mai we!* One night, I was in a hotel room with Denise, and you know those ceiling fans with a toggle to switch the thing on and off, *ja*? Well, in my sleep, I guess, I could hear the fan—*thuka, thuka, thuka*—and in my alcoholic state I thought it was a fucking helicopter coming to *chaya* me. Man, I woke up and I was screaming and leaping around the bed and donnering that fan with a pillow and there were feathers flying everywhere and Denise was screaming at me. But I honestly thought I was under attack."

The binges ended, inevitably, in fights. Once, in Bulawayo, when he was fresh out of the Army, K. got into a fight with three taxi-drivers and a taxi. By the time he was finished, the taxi-drivers were hospitalized and the taxi was a write-off. K. was fined two thousand dollars and given a ten-year suspended sentence. "Animals like you should not be allowed loose on the street," the judge told him.

Mapenga, K., and I decided to go together to the Train. A flat-topped mountain some twenty-five miles long and covered in thorn bushes, the Train was a refuelling station for R.L.I. planes flying into Mozambique from bases in Rhodesia during the war. It also served briefly as a base for black Rhodesian guerrillas and FRELIMO soldiers. During the war, K. and his team were often dropped there by helicopter to search for terrorists. Many R.L.I. troopies, as well as guerrilla fighters, came to recognize the mountain as the landmark that signalled the beginning of a skirmish.

"Come and walk in that shateen for a few hours," K. told me, "and you'll have an idea what it was like for us."

You can see the Train for a long time before you get to it. The closer Mapenga drove us, the more apprehensive K. became. The road was far from predictable and the noise of the truck's engine made speech difficult, but after a silence of an hour or more K. started to yell out a story. He told us that he had once been chased by fourteen guerrillas, from the Train to Mukumbura—a distance of maybe thirty miles.

"There was no way we were going to hold up to them, so we took off and ran," he shouted. "We ran for two days. And I knew that they couldn't run as fast as us, because there were only four *ous* in my stick and there were fourteen of them, so their best chance was to head us off. I knew they would think that we'd take the short cut, so I made the boys run the long way round. For two days and a night we ran without stopping. By the end, we'd thrown off everything we didn't need. We had our guns, our webbing, our water bottles—that was it, *chete*. Shit, I was tired and hungry after that, I can tell you."

Mapenga seemed to pay no attention to bridges (such as they were), or riverbeds, or pigs, or villagers, or even the road itself. He simply hurled the vehicle into the space ahead of us as fast as he could. At last, he shouted across to us, "There's a game path to the left there. Look out your window and see if you can spot it."

As the foliage whipped past us, K. spotted the track, and Mapenga wrenched the pickup around and hurtled off into the bush. As soon as we stopped, the heat and the flies settled on us. We walked away from the car. Elephant droppings were scattered around, and there were signs, too, of small antelope—duiker and impala, perhaps. The land showed few traces of its status as a symbol of war. Now it was just a densely scrubbed patch of arid ground.

I watched K.'s back as we walked, my eyes half closed against the persistent annoyance of mopane flies. Mapenga was hurrying ahead of us, effortlessly tearing through the bush. K. carried the water. Conversation dried on our tongues. I felt vulnerable and soft-skinned and breathless.

After an hour or so, Mapenga stopped at some unusual-looking humps of earth—each mound as big as a buried hut—and waited for us to catch up. "What do you think?" he asked.

K. speculated. "Ammo dumps?"

Mapenga said, "Or mass graves?"

The men exchanged a look that I couldn't read—a look that dated from a time when pacts of silence were made over silent heaps of ground.

"Or just an odd lump of dirt in the middle of nowhere," Mapenga said, kicking at the mound.

Then K. turned to me. "I want to show you something," he said. "Close your eyes." He took my shoulders and spun me around and around in circles. "Count to one hundred," he said. Then he let go and he and Mapenga walked away.

I waited and counted. Within seconds, I could no longer hear the men. Their footsteps had been engulfed by the buzzing of insects and the crackling of dry grass. I opened my eyes. The world had taken on a pale, sun-sucked color, shadowless and uniform.

I said, "Ninety-nine, one hundred," and began to walk.

The ground told me nothing. There was no trail—no distinct human trail—to follow. Until then, I had simply been following Mapenga. The earth looked scuffed but not trodden. I found myself hurrying toward what I hoped was the Train, but I couldn't tell. Every way I turned, jesse bush stared back at me, obscuring any landmarks. I looked up at the sky, but the sun had expanded to fill an indistinct space that might have been perpetual noon. In any case, I hadn't been paying attention to the sun when I left the car, so its position now would do little to orient me.

Within minutes, I felt a knot of panic in my belly. I didn't know where I was. I had no water. And I realized that, even after all the time I had spent with him, I didn't really know K. or what he was capable of. I didn't know to what extent he would want me to experience the sensation of being thirsty, alone, hunted.

"Yoo-hoo," I called.

The world crackled back at me.

I wondered where the nearest water was. I considered sitting down and waiting to see if anyone would come back and find me. The palms of my hands were covered in a chilled film of sweat.

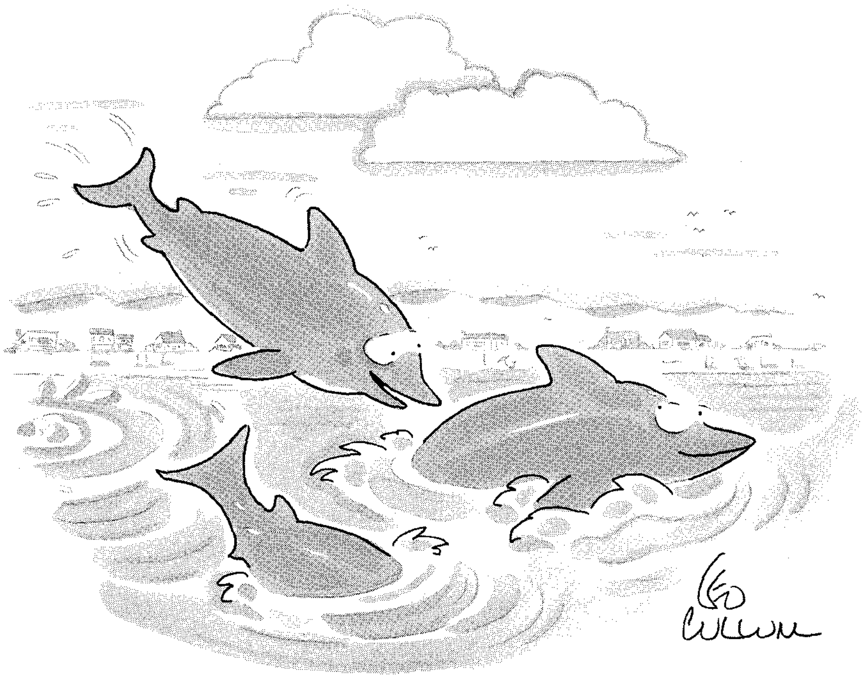
Suddenly the pale, leafy shrub in front of me exploded. "*Waka-waka-waka!*" The men appeared, spraying me with make-believe bullets from make-believe rifles, held at hip level.

"You'd be dead," K. said, turning and walking away.

"Scribbled," Mapenga agreed, laughing. Then he saw my face and said, "Were you worried there for a moment? Did you feel lost?"

I smiled weakly.

"We had you in our sights from the start," he said. "We could have shot you anytime." ♦



"Let's beach ourselves and get a massage."

PROFILES

HOMEBOY

The world of Lyle Lovett.

BY ALEC WILKINSON

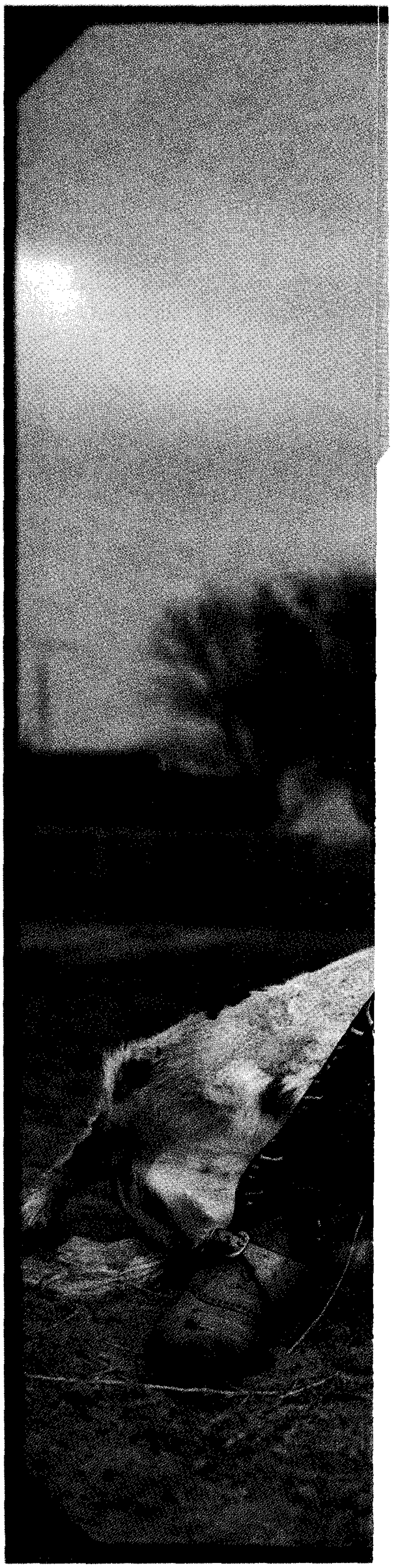
Klein, Texas, is halfway between Tomball and Spring, on the coastal plain north of Houston. The land is flat. The roads run straight along the old property lines and meet at right angles, like joints in furniture. Where there are fields with cattle or horses, the trees in the distance appear as remote and aloof as a coastline. Adam Klein, a German, arrived in 1848. He had made his way to New Orleans, taken passage up the Mississippi, and gone to California to mine gold. Then he rode a horse to Panama, sailed to Galveston, and settled among Germans with names such as Klink, Klebs, Doerre, and Strack, on land that reminded them of the farms they had left behind. According to a historical marker by the graveyard in Klein, which Lyle Lovett, the singer and songwriter, drove me to in his pickup one morning and then got out of his truck to show me, nearly the oldest grave in the cemetery belongs to one of Klein's daughters, who died of diphtheria.

Lovett lives in Klein. His mother's people are Kleins—Adam Klein was his great-great-grandfather. Lovett's house was built on Klein's farm by his grandparents, in 1911. Up and down the roads that enclose the farm are houses occupied by Lovett's relatives—each generation passed land to the next as it came of age. Bernell Klein, Lovett's mother, was born in the house. In 1962, when Lovett was five, Bernell and her husband, William, who was from East Texas, and who died a few years ago, built a house next door. Before that, they lived an hour from Klein, in Houston, where they worked for Humble Oil. They had always intended to move to Klein and send their son to the Lutheran school.

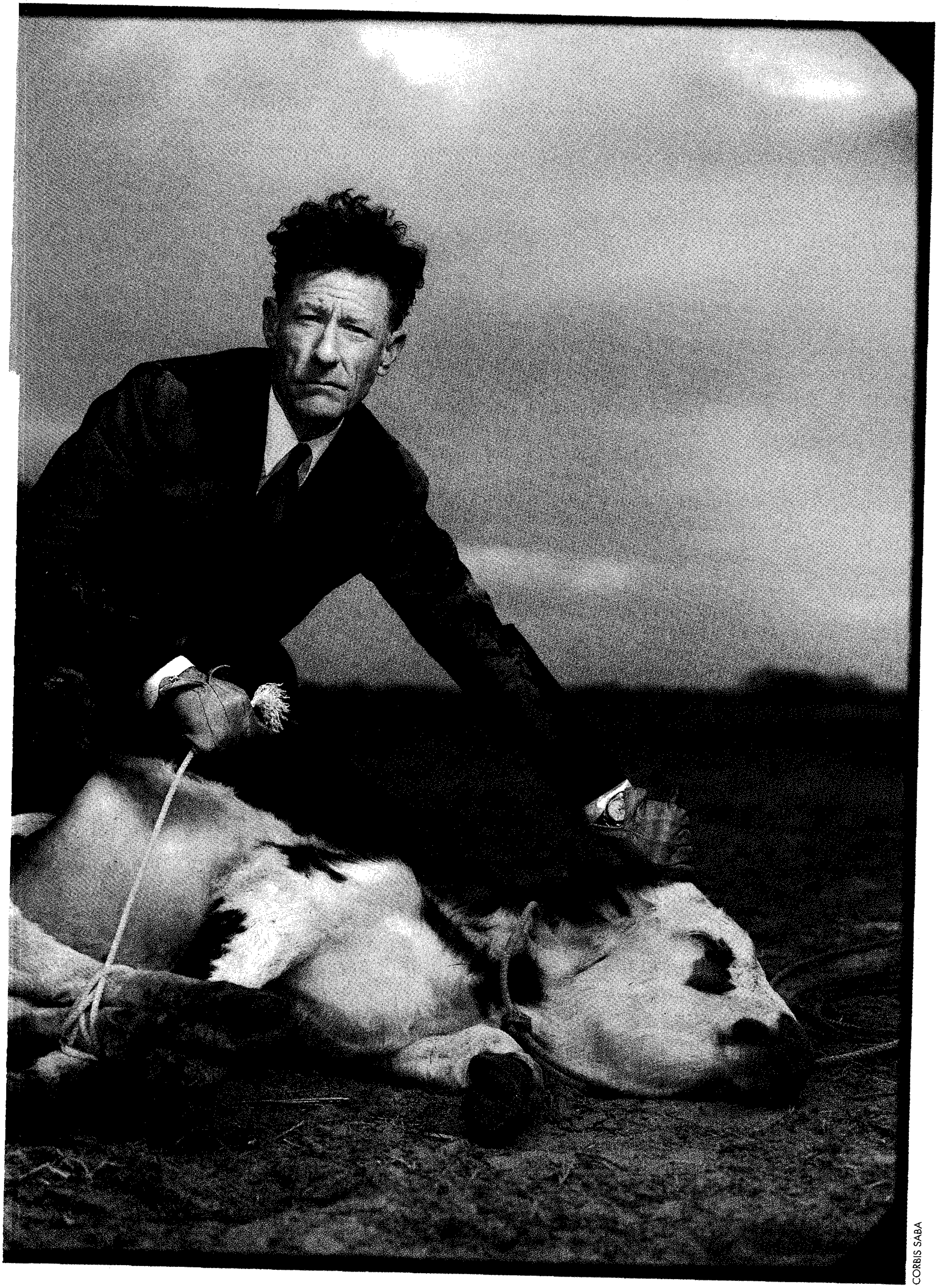
Lovett is an only child. Each day after school, he went to his grandparents' house until his parents came home from work. He developed a deep attachment to his grandparents and to the house, and he thought that when he was grown he would like to live in it, among their possessions. Lovett's grandmother, who survived her husband, died in 1979, when Lovett was twenty-one. Believing that the tax bill would be too much to accommodate, the family sold the house and what remained of Adam Klein's farm—about a hundred and sixty-five acres—to an investment group from Los Angeles, then discovered that the accounting of the bill had been wrong and they probably could have held on to the place.

The investment group put up "For Sale" signs, and while it waited for offers it leased the farm to Lovett's uncle Calvin Klein, a cattleman, to use as pastureland. The arrangement gave Klein no incentive to care for the buildings. In 1985, Klein and Lovett persuaded the group that a good way to improve the property would be to let Lovett buy the house and its barns and remove them. Before Lovett had the house transported two hundred yards, onto land that belonged to his parents, he measured the distance from the house to the trees in the yard, so that he could plant new trees. He recorded the placement of the outbuildings. When he sits in the kitchen now, early in the morning, drinking coffee and looking out the window, as his grandmother did, he sees the same things she saw.

The house is a small, one-story frame house of a style called pier and beam, which means that it sits on blocks. It has clapboard siding and is painted white, and has a wide front porch with columns. It is surrounded by shade trees, and there is a pond in front of it. The walk through the horse barn to the back door of Lovett's mother's house is about a hundred yards. Among the horses in



Lovett on Carol Rose's ranch in north Texas. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.



CORBIS SABA

the barn are ones that Lovett and his father bought to breed and race.

The house is furnished sparely. In the parlor, the principal adornments are two saddles, each in a corner on a sawhorse. A plaque on the kitchen wall that says "Beware of Bull" commemorates an encounter Lovett and his uncle Calvin had two years ago with a bull in the pasture behind the house. They had delivered a check to a bulldozer operator who was digging a ditch. Walking back across the field, they discussed a pecan tree that had no leaves when it should have and whether it had to come out. The bull walked slowly toward them. Lovett had found the bull in the pasture as a day-old calf. The calf had followed him as he walked through the herd looking for its mother, and when no cow acknowledged it Lovett decided to raise it on a bottle. Once the bull turned two, Lovett stayed out of its way, since it was playful and was big enough to hurt someone without meaning to. Klein, who is sixty-nine, has worked with cattle all his life, so Lovett felt, as the bull approached, that if there was any reason to be worried Klein would tell him. "Usually, you throw a hat down on the ground or slap your leg," Klein says, "and a bull will stop long enough for you to leave."

Klein absently flipped his hand toward the bull and told it to be gone. "The next thing, my uncle did a three-sixty flip in the air," Lovett says. "Bulls, when they're really going at something, they'll get down on their knees and work their head on it. He had his head on my uncle's chest, and had torn up his shirt, and I went over and started smacking him with my cap, and he went for me."

The bull pinned Lovett against a board fence and raked him back and forth until the fence post broke his leg. He lay on the ground and said, "Uncs, I can't get up." Klein and a friend from Tomball who had just arrived pulled Lovett over the fence. They laid him down in the pasture and waited for the ambulance. Klein's arm was bleeding, and his chest was heaving—the bull had fractured several of his ribs.

"I was the ignorant one to trust him," Klein says. "You take a wild bull, they might hurt you, but a pet bull will kill you. They have no fear. My dad almost got killed by a Jersey bull that was a pet."

Lovett's leg was broken in so many places that it couldn't be set; it had to be pinned together. He performed his next tour sitting down, and was fortunate not to have been crippled. He doesn't much like talking about the bull—he doesn't especially enjoy answering questions at all—and sometimes, to deflect people who ask how he broke his leg, he shrugs and says mildly, "Just walking around."

Lovett is tall and thin. His shoulders are narrow. He has long, ropy arms and broad hands. There are pleats in his cheeks, and wavy lines across his forehead. His eyes are pale blue. Their expression is intelligent and measuring to the point of guardedness. His ears are large and his nose is large and his eyes are small and close together, but they are arranged in such a fashion that his face has the solemn and handsome dignity of a workingman of the thirties, a farmer who hears the sound of your tractor stalling in the field and shows up to help you get it started.

For most of his career, his persona has been ambiguous. Billy Williams, his producer, says, "Lyle mistakenly sees himself as an ordinary human being." Bonnie Raitt, with whom he made his first big tour, in 1986, following her bus in his pickup, regarded the way he looked—the skinny-legged suits, the hair rising like a bloom—as exotic. "He was always very sartorially astute," she says. A Texas musician in Nashville who met Lovett before he was famous once told a reporter, "I took one look at him and pegged him for a French blues singer." Lovett is not a demonstrative person. Raitt describes his temperament admiringly as "a banked fire." Many women find him deeply attractive. Raitt also told me that sometimes when she and Lovett perform together and he looks over at her, she feels her "knees buckle."

Lovett is smarter than most people he meets, but he conceals it. He has something of the typical country musician's attitude that one must never affect to have risen above one's beginnings. He is very polite, but his manners can conceal disdain. His habits of mind are meticulous, and he says he has difficulty doing anything casually. His sympathies are mostly charitable—he says that when he writes a song he imagines that he wouldn't mind meeting anyone who liked it—but he is also prone to judging people harshly on little evidence and holding his opinions steadfastly.

Occasionally, Lovett dresses like the celebrated person he is—Prada and Armani send him clothes to wear onstage—but he nearly always wears cowboy boots. Lovett's boots are made by a man in Austin named Lee Miller. One morning last summer, Lovett stopped by Miller's to order a new pair.

Miller is in his late forties. His parents had a department store in Rutland, Vermont. "I hung out in the shoe department," he told me. "I was fascinated by footwear." He went to a bootmaking college in Oklahoma. Each year, an old bootmaker in Austin named Charlie Dunn hired the student who graduated first in the class. Miller went to work for Dunn, who was in the habit of driving off his employees. Miller grew accustomed to being fired, then arriving home and having Dunn call and hire him back. "He was from the old days," Miller says, "when you said it like it was, then regretted it later." Dunn died in 1993—he was ninety-five—and Miller took over the business. While Miller told me this story, Lovett and Miller's wife, Carrlyn, discussed Lovett's new boots. They decided they would be two-piece boots—that is, made from two pieces of leather, instead of four. "I love two-piece," Carrlyn said. "They feel like you're wearing socks with soles and heels."

On a counter in the workshop were two boot tops stretched out flat. They were black, with red hearts and yellow arrows and white guitars embedded in them, and, in white letters, the name "Lucky Bill." They had been attached to one of the few pairs of boots ever returned to Miller. "Lucky Bill's a guy from someplace out West," Lovett said, "and he was not happy with how they turned out. He took them to a bootmaker in Las Vegas or Reno, and made a videotape of the guy criticizing all the flaws—or what he regarded as flaws—and he sent the tape back to Lee with the boots."

"He said the arrows were too dark, and the guitars couldn't be read from the stage," Miller said. "He's a night-club singer, I guess, and he wore them for his act."

"Two years ago, I walked into the shop and saw them and thought they were great, and I wore them for two weeks, even though they were too big for me," Lovett said. "I walked around the Austin airport and everyone came up to me and asked me about the boots. I was going to make a videotape of them talking about all the things they liked and send it to Lucky Bill."

"Instead, he's writing a song about Unlucky Bill, who lost his boots in a card game," Miller said. He told Lovett that he hoped to have the new boots ready in a few months. He unrolled several alligator hides he thought might be right for them, and then Lovett bought some shoe trees.

Lovett is excessively self-effacing. Miller said, "Lyle, a friend of mine called the other day and asked me, 'If you're in the record store, and you're going to buy only one Lyle Lovett record, which one do you get?' I said I didn't know, I'd ask you."

"Willie Nelson," Lovett said. " 'Red Headed Stranger.' "

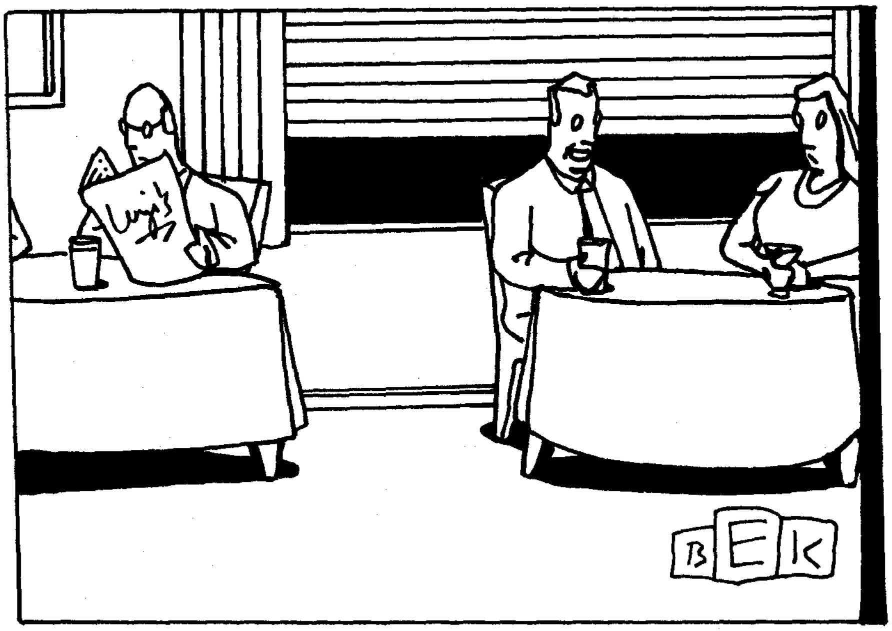
Lovett tours assiduously. He had a long tour last summer with his Large Band, which includes twelve other musicians and four singers, and then, to promote his new record, "My Baby Don't Tolerate," which came out at the end of September, he went on the road with a smaller band, essentially the Large Band without the singers and the horns, and with a few changes in personnel. He also came to New York and played guitar and sang by himself one night on a small stage downtown, and he went to Los Angeles with a five-piece band to appear on the "Tonight Show." Otherwise, he mostly stayed in Klein.

Before Lovett made records, he often played in Houston and Austin, with two musicians who are still members of his band. In Houston, he was accompanied by James Gilmer, a percussionist, and in Austin he appeared with John Hagen, who plays cello. Hagen was working in a print and copy shop, and Gilmer was the manager of an outfit called Acme Tools, which imported inexpensive hand tools from Korea and Taiwan. After Lovett's first record came out, in 1986, the three of them toured together. When Lovett describes this period, he says things such as "During the cello solo, which all of them were cello solos." In the South and the Midwest, playing for country-and-Western audiences, the three were sometimes embraced and sometimes not. Hagen remembers their playing in Nashville at a showcase for bookers of country bands and hearing one booker tell another, "I feel sorry for that guy with the bongos and the viola."

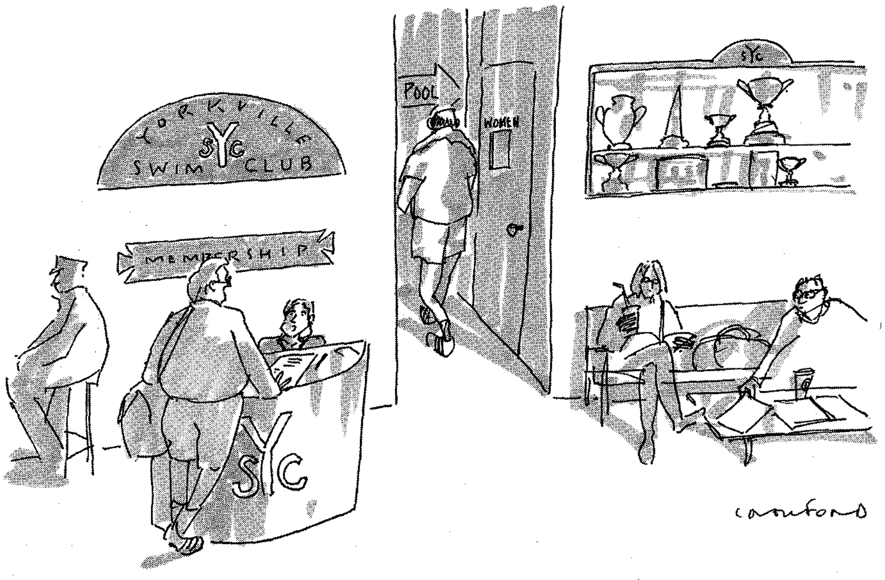
Lovett is regarded as a country-and-Western musician, but his catalogue is far too diverse for a category. John Hagen, whose background is in classical music, says, "The difficult thing to explain to people if they haven't heard Lyle is what does he do. He crosses so many genres it falls in the cracks. It's not country, it's not jazz or blues, it's not rock and roll, it's not strictly swing, but it's all those things. There is no word for his style."

Lovett had always intended to record country music, blues, ballads, gospel and church songs, rockabilly songs, folk songs, Western swing tunes, and songs with big-band arrangements, but he didn't think he could get away with having records devoted to a single classification, so he put them together, usually with half of a record devoted to a particular style. Even a Lovett song with a straightforward country structure—such as, say, "The Truck Song," from his new record—is subversive. The song describes a man's dependence on his pickup truck, and for two verses its sentiments are conventional. The narrator says that he's been on the road for three days in his rickety truck, which he calls Old Black. Then, "I went to high school / I was not popular / Now I am older / And it don't matter." Then there's a verse saying that he's slept in his truck on occasion. Then, a trifle defensively, "I've been to Paris / I don't mean Texas / I met Wim Wenders / One time in London." The surprising juxtaposition exemplifies Lovett's writing. A sentimental subject is not handled predictably, as a clever redneck poem; instead, it becomes the expression of an inner life, a single existence and sensibility—you think I'm a hick, but I've been to Europe—which is both amusing and unsettling.

Lovett likes songs that have a story, and especially one that is told by a character, often a solitary whose habits and manners are peculiar. A Lovett song frequently illuminates parts of the character's experience that aren't quite suitable



"Don't get me wrong—I'm pro crazy bitches."



"We're not accepting applications right now, but we'll give you a call the minute one of our members drowns."

conversation. The narrators tend to be a little combative and sometimes sulky: "Don't Touch My Hat," "That's Right (You're Not from Texas)," and "God Will," in which a man tells his cheating lover, God loves you, but I don't. "Creeps Like Me" has a narrator who wears a ring made from his grandmother's gold tooth, which he killed her for. "You look surprised," he sings brightly. "You shouldn't be. / This world is full of creeps like me."

Lovett's most masterly song is a lament about his father called "You Were Always There," which appears on his new record. His father died without warning, of a stroke. The song is written in a minor key and is sparsely arranged. Its lyrics include terse images of horses and riding and death and loss. "The sun comes up," Lovett sings, "the world goes around and around / There's no bad luck, / There's just the luck you've found." Then, "You steal away / Into a lonesome sound. / Another day is lowered in the ground." His delivery is subdued—the song is confided as much as sung—and the repetition of the line "You were always there" suggests a bewilderment, a stasis, a resistance to absorbing the loss. He is describing not the diminished present but the beautiful past. It is a mature work, intensely dramatic, a solemn and keening observation of grief.

Lovett's voice is typically a bit raspy, and his diction is slurry. He often sounds as if you'd just woken him up. "Wire" becomes "wi-er." "Threw" becomes "thoo." He isn't a belter. When he takes part in a gospel shout—as the song "I'm Going to Wait," also from his new record, requires him to do in performance—he seems courteous. He's persuasive, though, as if he had just got the spirit and felt it fervently but weren't quite sure how to handle it.

Singing was part of Lovett's Lutheran education. "Every school day began with a devotion," he says. "The teachers would get us together, and the best player among them would play the piano, and the rest would lead the singing." When the children were old enough to be made into a choir, they were lined up against the lockers and led in a song. The choir director walked along the row with his ear lowered. The children he selected to stand in a second line were sent to recess. Lovett and the others remaining became the choir.

Lovett's parents encouraged him to play music. He took guitar lessons at a music store in Houston. His mother drove an hour home from work in the city, picked up Lovett, drove back to the city, and waited while he had his lesson. They arrived home around nine-thirty or ten at night. Lovett's mother and father left the house at five-thirty or six in the morning. "I was always able to do what I wanted to do because my parents did what they had to do," Lovett says. "I'm the other part of their imagination."

Lovett went to a public high school. In ninth grade, he was invited to be in a band. All of its members, including Lovett, belonged to the Future Farmers of America. "I owned a guitar, so I got drafted, but I wasn't really good enough to be in the band," he says. "My friend Anthony Hildebrandt played bass. He's a machinist now, and he does custom cattle feed, too." The band included a singer, two guitar players, a bass player, and a drummer, and they practiced in the Hildebrandts' garage. On the F.F.A. calendar the biggest event is the F.F.A. Project Show. For the F.F.A. Project, a child raises a piece of livestock (Lovett raised a steer), which is judged at a fair and then sold. Lovett's band entered the fair's battle of the bands. Prizes were given for first and second place. "Our ag teacher came backstage after the show and said, 'Well, boys, you came in third.' The other guys received that news kind of gladly," Lovett says, "and I was saying, 'Wait a second . . .' "

After ninth grade, Lovett no longer played in bands, but he still took guitar lessons, from a student at the University of Houston. When Lovett was seventeen, he enrolled at Texas A. & M., in College Station, about seventy miles from Klein. By the time he was eighteen, he had begun playing in clubs around town. He studied history, but he liked writing and became a journalism major, because "making up songs, it was not a real job," he says. "It didn't feel like any legitimate pursuit that I would be able to continue." For *The Battalion,* the school's daily paper, he wrote about the city council of Bryan, a cotton town. He also interviewed songwriters he admired—among them Michael Martin Murphey, Steven Fromholz, Eric Taylor, and Willis Alan Ramsey. He couldn't bear to write anything uncomplimentary about them. With Taylor, he interrupted the interview and asked the musician to teach him one of his songs. Eventually, Lovett gave up the idea of being a journalist, because, he says, he would think of a question, then decide, That's none of my business.

Lovett spent five years as an undergraduate. He was more comfortable telling people he was a student than he was describing himself as a songwriter. After he got his degree, in journalism, he moved back to his bedroom in his parents' house in Klein and played in clubs in Houston. "When the winter rolled around, I felt like I wasn't accomplishing anything," he says. "I missed the structure of school, and I realized that I was only a semester short of getting a degree in German, so I went back."

I asked Lovett if while he was living at home he was allowed to have girls in his room, and he said evenly, "I can't tell you everything."

For the last six years, Lovett has been seeing a young woman named April Kimble, who grew up in San Antonio. Kimble is tall and slender and vivacious. She was a student at Texas A. & M. and was introduced to Lovett at a talk he gave about ethics in journalism. She has a mind for figures and procedures and levelheaded thinking, and in a number of matters Lovett depends on her judgment. On her left hand she wears a diamond ring that Lovett gave her. Lovett was briefly married, ten years ago, to the actress Julia Roberts. Their marriage is a subject he will not discuss. The only time I know of his referring to it was in a performance a few years ago, when he elided the phrase "or movie stars" from his song "Penguins." The phrase is preceded by the lines "I don't go for fancy cars, / For diamond rings." Instead, he hummed.

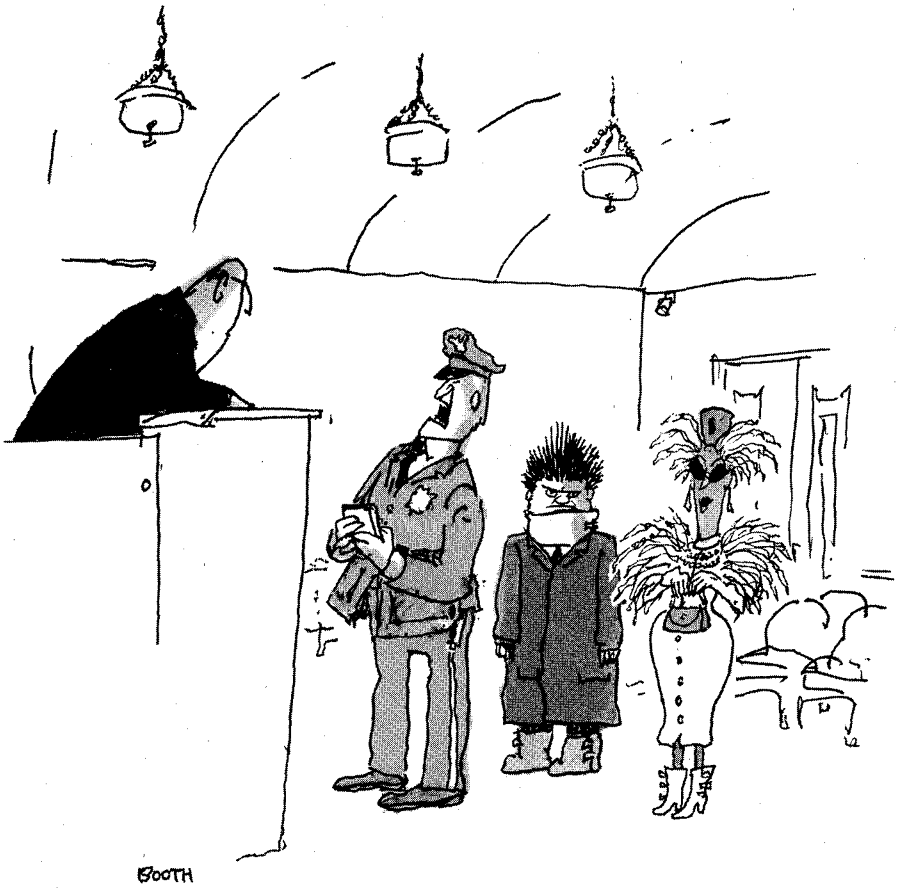
Early last summer, Lovett and Kimble were living at a hotel in Beverly Hills while Lovett worked on his new record. Just about every day, he would leave the hotel garage—he likes to park his own car, which allows him to take the elevator directly to his floor and avoid the lobby—and drive over the hills to a recording studio in Burbank, where he and Billy Williams would spend the day listening to versions of the songs he had recorded and decide whether to erase a squeak made by Lovett's fingers on the strings of his guitar or make the piano solo incrementally louder or try to make the gospel choir on one track sound as if it were standing closer to him.

Lovett and Williams met in 1983, at a festival in Luxembourg which had a tent devoted to American music. Williams was a guitar player in a country-and-Western band from Phoenix. Lovett played the set changes—that is, while one band's equipment was being cleared from the stage and the next brought on, Lovett stood below the stage and sang and played guitar. I asked Williams how Lovett's performances were received, and he closed his eyes, as if recalling them, and said, "It wasn't magic." Then, "They didn't pay too much attention to us, either."

I asked what Lovett was like then. "Very shy," he said. "Mild and very soft-spoken, and I remember thinking, I don't know if this guy is forceful enough to climb up through it."

Before Williams left Luxembourg, he told Lovett that if he came to Phoenix he and the other musicians would play behind him if he wanted to record some songs. Lovett would only have to pay for the studio. A few months later, Lovett arrived. "We sat in my living room," Williams says, "and he played me his songs, and I tried to think of how to arrange them."

Initially, they recorded four songs. Lovett, carrying the tapes, made trips from Klein to Nashville every four or six weeks. Friends let him sleep on their couches. Back home, his mother taught the employees of various companies how to write business letters, how to proofread and use words properly—to use "different from" instead of "different than," for example—and sometimes when people called to hire her she would say, "I have a son who needs work, maybe he can help you." Lovett liked teaching—he says that standing in front of a class was a little like standing on a stage. The money he made he used to record more songs in Phoenix. Eventually, he and Williams and the band



"Both vehicles stopped at the intersection. Mrs. Dinkel waved. Mr. Wang put his vehicle in gear proceeding into the intersection. Mrs. Dinkel also moved her vehicle forward, colliding with Mr. Wang's vehicle. Mrs. Dinkel states she was not waving to give Mr. Wang the right of way; she states she was waving to Mrs. Gladys Hooper-Smith in her vehicle passing overhead on Highway I-95, politely extending a yoo-hoo to Mrs. Hooper-Smith and her Lhasa Apso."

recorded eighteen songs, which cost Lovett thirty thousand dollars. After about a year of visiting Nashville, Lovett got an introduction to a man at a publishing company who said that if Lovett signed with the company he thought he could get him a record deal. Ten of the songs Lovett recorded in Phoenix became his first record. The rest, in new versions, appeared on his second and third records.

Since childhood, Lovett has ridden horses and been interested in cowboys. Most of the time, he dresses like a cowboy. When he rides, he wears spurs with his name on them. Until lately, he had never taken a riding lesson, but he has begun learning maneuvers specific to cow-horse competitions—contests that feature the ability of a horse and rider to do ranch work. Lovett hopes to become proficient enough to ride his own horses in amateur trials run by the National Reined Cow Horse Association.

Lovett has attended cow-horse trials for three years, and not long ago, from a breeder and trainer named Carol Rose, he bought two horses to be trained for the work. He also asked Rose if she would teach him the intricacies of riding them. Rose's ranch is in Gainesville, Texas, near the border with Oklahoma. Rose is a small, good-looking, effusive woman who appears to be in her fifties—"age is a number and mine is unlisted," she says. She has probably bred more champion performance quarter horses than any other breeder has, and she is a member of the Cowgirl Hall of Fame. One night last summer, after playing in Fort Worth, Lovett went to dinner with Rose and a number of other prominent quarter-horse people. The next morning, I drove about an hour with him and Michael Wilson, the photographer who has taken most of the portraits of Lovett for his record covers, to Rose's ranch, so that Lovett could ride his horses, Shiner's Bootlegger and Fifth Avenue Cash. We arrived around ten. Rose was in the arena, with three other riders. During the summer, trainers begin working their horses around three or four in the morning to get them back to the barn before the worst heat.

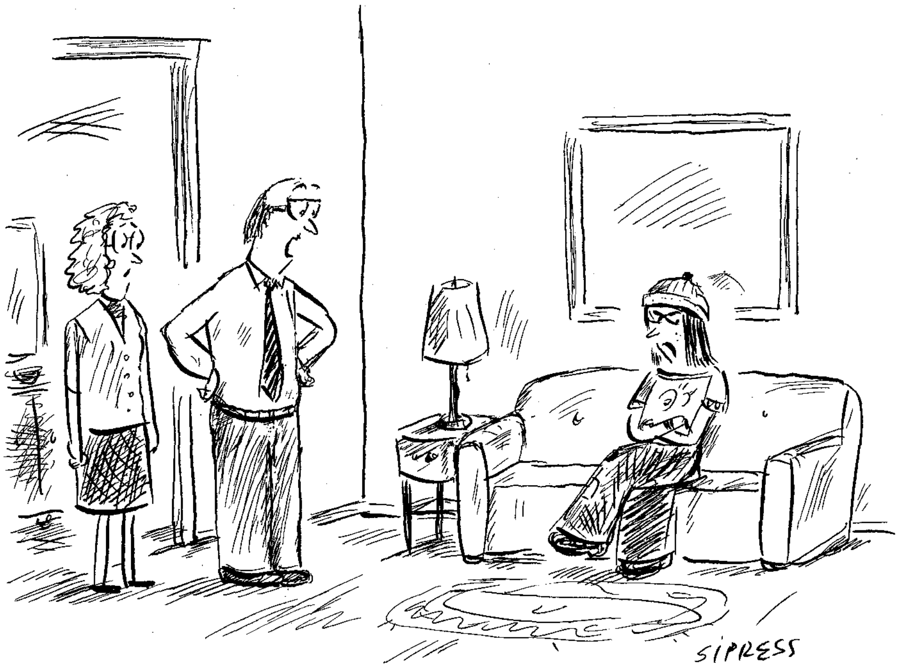
A stable hand asked Lovett which horse he wanted to ride first, and he said Bootlegger. The stable hand put a saddle on the horse, and gave the reins to Lovett. In the arena, when Lovett's turn came, Rose had him ride at a lope in a big circle, then in smaller ones, while she shouted remarks such as "All right, Lyle, you look awesome." Lovett rode in so precise an agreement with his horse that he looked like a man on a carrousel—that is, his head went up and down, and his back remained straight. Watching him, I realized how poorly most horses are ridden in movies.

Rose next had Lovett ride to the center of the arena and perform four spinning turns, a trials requirement. "Four turns, Lyle, not four and a quarter," she said when he finished. "Say *one* after you go, then *two*, then *three*, then *whoa.*" The next time, Lovett stopped on the mark, but his hat, a cowboy panama, lay brim up in the dirt. He rode off without it. Another rider dismounted and collected it. Since Lovett was engaged, the rider brought it over to the fence and gave it to me.

"Funny thing about the hat," the cowboy said. "You can drop it in the arena, cows can step on it, defecate in it; horses trample it, fill it with dust and dirt; a tractor can even run it over; but don't let a man touch it. No, sir." Lovett has a collection of cowboy hats and hard-plastic hatboxes with leather handles to carry them in. After defending his hat from a stewardess who kept trying to stow it, he wrote "Don't Touch My Hat." The narrator challenges a man whom he catches studying his hat. "You can have my girl," he says pointedly, "but don't touch my hat."

Rose came over to the fence and spoke to a young woman who had been watching the riders. "Run to the house and get me some of that extra-hold hair spray," she said. "I'm going to fix Lyle's hat." When the young woman returned, Rose applied hair spray to the inside of the hatband, waited for it to get sticky, and gave Lovett the hat. "That should take care of it, Lyle," she said. "It's always better for a cowboy to wear his hat."

Rose then had cows sent into the arena, one at a time, and the riders practiced stopping them and turning them on their heels, an activity called boxing. Lovett's first cow spread its ears like wings and lowered its head. Each time it took a step, the horse took a step, too. It was like chess. Rose finally said, "Get Lyle another cow. This one's lazy." The next cow ducked and dodged, and the horse responded, leading it back and forth, snapping Lovett from one side to the other in his saddle as if someone were shaking him. I asked Rose if Lovett had talent for the work. "Lyle's got good balance, good hands, his timing's excellent, and he absorbs everything you tell



"Sure, I fooled around with drugs when I was your age, but that was to protest the war."

him," she said. "He needs to learn the basics of where the cow is, and where he needs to be, but it's only the second time he's done it."

When the riding was finished, Rose and Lovett and Michael Wilson and I and the other riders drove in two trucks out to a pasture to look at some yearling fillies. Rose parked her truck in the field. About ten horses stood thirty feet away from us, eying us nervously. Rose called to them, and they moved a step or two closer.

Lovett had brought a video camera, and he pointed it at the horses. "Lyle, there's a palomino filly coming with a star on her head," Rose said. "I have grown to have an awesome affection for her." Lovett pointed the camera at the horse. "She's a pretty little mover," Rose said. "She just flows on the ground."

I began a conversation with Dickson Varner, a veterinarian whose specialty is horse fertility. He has clients in the Middle East, he said, whose horses are so valuable as studs that he can't mention the names. If it was thought that they had problems, their fees would drop. He had been making a routine visit to Rose's ranch, and she had asked him to stay over and ride.

Rose said it was time for lunch, and we got back in the truck. Someone mentioned that Varner had been a professional bull rider when he was younger. "My parents were rodeo producers," Varner said modestly, "so it was a family job."

I asked how old he was when he rode his first bull, and he said, "Nine. My father found an old crow-hopping, straight-tracking bull that would buck in a line and told me to ride him. I said I didn't want to. He said it was the bull or him. I got on and made it across the arena, and finally I hit the fence, and I grabbed it and held on. My shirt was all tore up, and I was crying. I looked back, and he was waving me over to ride another one."

I asked when he had given it up. "Last bull I rode was at Madison Square Garden, the weekend before veterinary school began," he said. "At the time, I was recovering from a broken back."

Rose served a big luxurious lunch of Mexican food. It was like a Spanish Thanksgiving. As for the conversation, everyone agreed that Amarillo had the toughest airport security anywhere, but someone pointed out that at least they offered you a boot jack.

Over the summer, I met up with Lovett one rainy night in Philadelphia, where he was to perform with the Large Band on a stage beside the Delaware River. The crowd waited in the rain and got soaked. I sat with Lovett on his bus and looked at tapes of the fillies in the field at Carol Rose's ranch. Onstage, under a leaky awning, the drums and the piano and the pedal steel guitar were covered with big sheets of plastic, like drop cloths. The Large Band is very expensive to keep on the road. Lovett essentially plays five nights to break even, then makes his money on the sixth night. He can't easily afford to cancel a show. The rain slowed to a drizzle around showtime. Lovett stood behind a curtain by the side of the stage with Gilmer, Hagen, and Viktor Krauss, his bass player.

"I think we should start out as a quartet," Lovett said to Gilmer. "If we get a break in the rain, we can bring some people up."

Gilmer nodded.

Lovett said, as if to himself, "O.K. No telling what this show will be like." Then, to Gilmer, "So, quartet, huh?"

"Fine with me," Gilmer said.

"Are John and Viktor all right with that?"

They both said they were.

"You quit anytime you want to," Lovett said.

"It's dry onstage, right?" Hagen asked.

"I don't know," Lovett told him. "Feel free to leave." Then, "Let's start with 'Which Way Does That Old Pony Run,' and after that I have no idea." He turned to me and said, "It's what the original trio would have been if we'd had a bass player. Or found one who'd work cheap enough."

The audience received Lovett warmly. In the bright stage light, the rain made scratchy little tracks in the air above them. Sometimes it fell on the musicians. Gilmer now and then dried off his cymbals and drums with a white

CHLOE IN LATE JANUARY

Midwinter here, a frozen pause, and now
some nineteen years since cancer took your life.

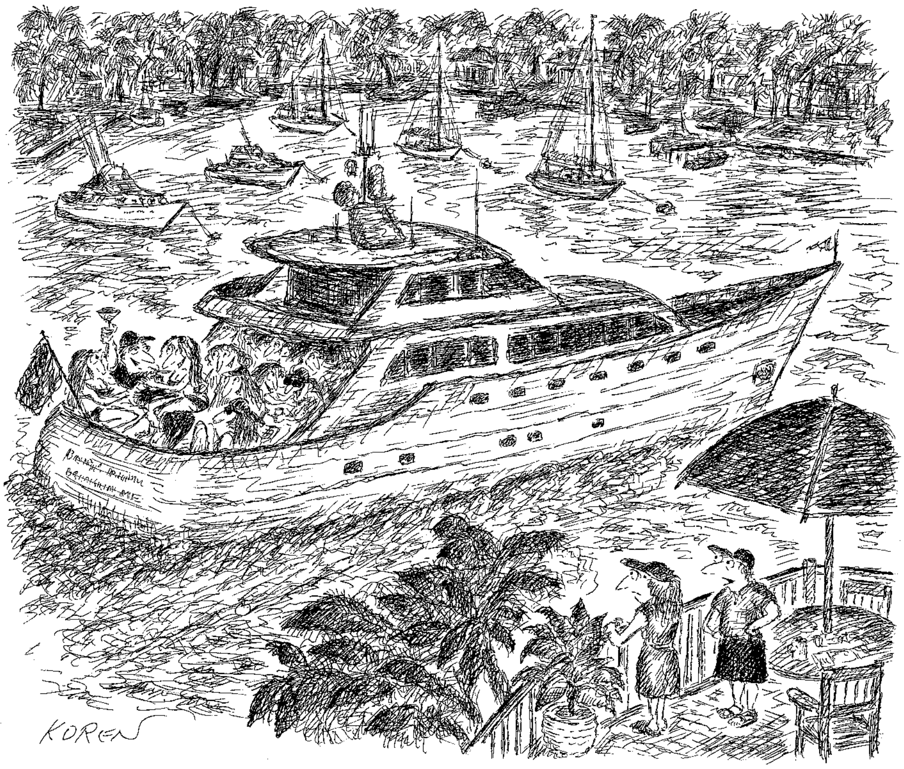
This month's old god, they say, faced opposite directions,
backward and forward. May I do that, too?

It's much the same. Deer come and go, as soft
as souls in Hades, glimpsed at wood's edge toward dusk;
their tracks in daylight show they come at night
to taste my neighbor's crab trees, last fall's fruit
shrunk down to sour puckered berries.

And where, in this arrested world,
might I expect to meet your cordial spirit?

You would not bother with that graveyard, smooth
below its gleaming cloak of snow. You'd want
to weave among the trees, beside the tiny kinglet,
gold head aglow, warming itself
with ingenuities, adapting, singing,
borne on the major currents of this life
like the creek that surprised me yesterday again,
running full tilt across its pebbled bottom
even in this deep cold.

—*David Young*



"Haviland is a model of how to enjoy a variety of felony charges."

towel, like a man wiping down a bar. When he hit a cymbal, water sprayed from it. He is a big, lugubrious man whose presence can be imposing, but his playing is austere and elegant and understated. Mostly, it contributes emphasis here and there to what Lovett is singing. In the course of a concert, he and Lovett appear to be engaged in a sly and literate conversation that because of the deep familiarity between the speakers has come to be signified by its essentials and shared understandings. Two laconic men nodding and saying to each other, Yes, sir, and I know it, You don't mean it, and How cool is that.

The four men played for about forty minutes, then the rain stopped. Mitch Watkins, the guitar player, walked out, and a stagehand pulled the plastic off the piano. The singers—three men and one woman—stood in the wings watching. On the next song, I heard the woman, Francine Reed, ask, "Are we supposed to be out there?" Then they all ran to the microphone in time for the chorus. Lovett played "Blue Skies" and "Summer Wind," smiling just faintly enough so that you could tell the choices appealed to his sense of humor.

After the concert, I rode with Lovett and Kimble and Ultan Guilfoyle, a documentary filmmaker who is a friend of Lovett's, and Mitch Watkins and Gilmer and Hagen and Gene Elders, the fiddle player, on the bus to Cape Cod, for Lovett's next concert.

We arrived at the hotel in Hyannis about eight in the morning. Lovett was playing that night at the Cape Cod Melody Tent, which has a revolving stage. Kimble walked out, as she usually does, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Lyle Lovett and his Large Band." The band played a sprightly, night-clubby swing tune on its own, then Lovett arrived and sang "Mack the Knife." His version is mournful and sinister and not at all like the pop version that was a hit years ago for Bobby Darin. The stage turned slowly. A few songs into the show, the singers joined Lovett, which meant that there were now seventeen people on the stage. I was watching with Guilfoyle, who leaned toward me and whispered, "The stage has stopped turning." Eventually, it was repaired, and the musicians wheeled slowly, like figures on a wedding cake.

The next day, Lovett and Guilfoyle borrowed motorcycles from Kevin Hines, a friend of Lovett's, and the three of them rode at a dirt track near Hines's house, just off the Cape. Lovett's parents bought him a minibike when he was ten, to ride around the pastures. He became interested in the kind of dirt-track races that used to be called scrambles and now are called motocross. A motocross rider needs to be in good shape, to prevent being injured, so Lovett, to appease his father's concerns, joined the track team and sometimes ran to school in the morning. His parents would drop off his clothes on their way to work, and he would shower in the gym. On the weekends, they took him to his races. His mother borrowed movie cameras from her office to film them, and then she began covering the races for a motocross newspaper.

Hines is a racer with a national reputation. A few years ago, Lovett bought a motorcycle dealership in Houston—Lyle Lovett Motorsports—and hired Hines to come down from Massachusetts and run it for a year. Riding motorcycles was another pleasure Lovett shared with his father, and a few years after he died Lovett sold the dealership.

Hines had come to our hotel. On the way to the track, he made a U-turn to pull into a place that had been a gas station and now had a lineup of Harley-Davidsons parked on its apron and a sign saying "Rent a Harley." The three of them were curious to see what it cost. Lovett was dressed in a shirt and jeans and his cowboy boots. The owner was wearing a shirt and cut-off jeans and combat boots. He was closing for lunch. Lovett asked politely what someone needed to rent a Harley. "You need a motorcycle license," the guy said. Lovett nodded. The guy looked Lovett up and down. "Then you need to convince me you can ride a Harley," he said. Then he turned his back on us.

The track belonged to a contractor named Bob Kelliher, who had a sideline gravel business. Having removed the fill and gravel from a pit about the size of a couple of football fields, he decided to bulldoze a hilly, twisting motocross track into it. Kelliher is forty-five. He was going around the track when we arrived. It was a hot day. A motocross rider wears a helmet and lots of padding, and Kelliher was drenched with sweat. He pulled off the track and came over to us. While Hines and Guilfoyle were getting dressed, Lovett asked Kelliher if he minded having his picture taken, and when Kelliher said not at all, Lovett pointed his video camera at him and said, "Howdy, Bob, thank you for having us out here today." When he got the shot he wanted, Lovett stepped into the truck and changed into riding gear. For the next hour or so, the four of them went round and round the track, while I tried to find places from which to tape them, with Lovett's camera, flying over the hills. Lovett was tired when they finished but the happiest I had seen him.

We drove back to Hines's house, which is on a pond, and borrowed bathing suits and went swimming. The water was dark and cool and we swam out a ways and treaded water, then went back to the dock. Hines got lobsters for us, and we had a fine dinner and went back to the hotel around ten.

The next morning at breakfast, Lovett's manner was grave. The night before, at a racetrack outside Houston, one of his horses had fallen and broken her spine. His mother and uncle were in the stands, and had to go down to the track and make the decision to have the horse put to sleep. They had tried to reach Lovett, but he had gone to bed and turned off his phone. By the morning he had twelve messages. "She's Dad's last horse," he said at breakfast. "He never got to see her grow up."

Lovett bought back Adam Klein's farm in 1995, using "all that great music-business money, which I'm still paying on," he says. "I paid what they wanted, so I paid more than it was worth. I just wanted to get it back." For years, he had avoided walking in the fields, so as not to see the "For Sale" signs.

The Kleins built on the perimeter of the farm, to be close to the roads. What is left of the fields is a pasture in the interior, like a huge courtyard. Not all the land around it remains in the family. Now and then a helicopter passes over the farm, and that is a neighbor who is the minister of three African-American congregations and travels among them in the helicopter. The pasture has been farmed since Adam Klein settled it. Lovett's grandfather ran the place as a truck farm, and his sons ran it as a dairy farm. Lovett has horses and cattle on it.

One evening in September, Lovett and I and Jorge Mandujano, Lovett's ranch hand, sprayed on bug spray, then rode horses along the fence line to the trees at the far end of the pasture. We circled a pond and turned back toward the barn. It took us about forty-five minutes. The cows lifted their heads from the grass and watched us. Lovett and Mandujano fed the horses, then Lovett and I played for a while with some big Dobermans he keeps. Then we walked past the house to a field and stopped among some shade trees. "We'd be standing on my grandmother's front porch here," Lovett said. He took a few steps. "The back door was about here," he said, "and this holly tree was right at the end of her bedroom window."

The sun was low over the pasture. The helicopter flew over the far fence line. "There goes the reverend," Lovett said. We turned back toward the house. "By the time I was in high school, the old farmers had started selling their home places and moving up to Madisonville," Lovett said. "It went on my entire growing up. Seemed like there was always a deal going on. Everything was changing, and I thought, Wouldn't it be great to preserve this farm—have it all put back the way it was supposed to look."

Lovett's mother's car turned in to her driveway. Kimble came out the back door of Lovett's house and walked toward us.

"There's Momma," Lovett said to her when she arrived.

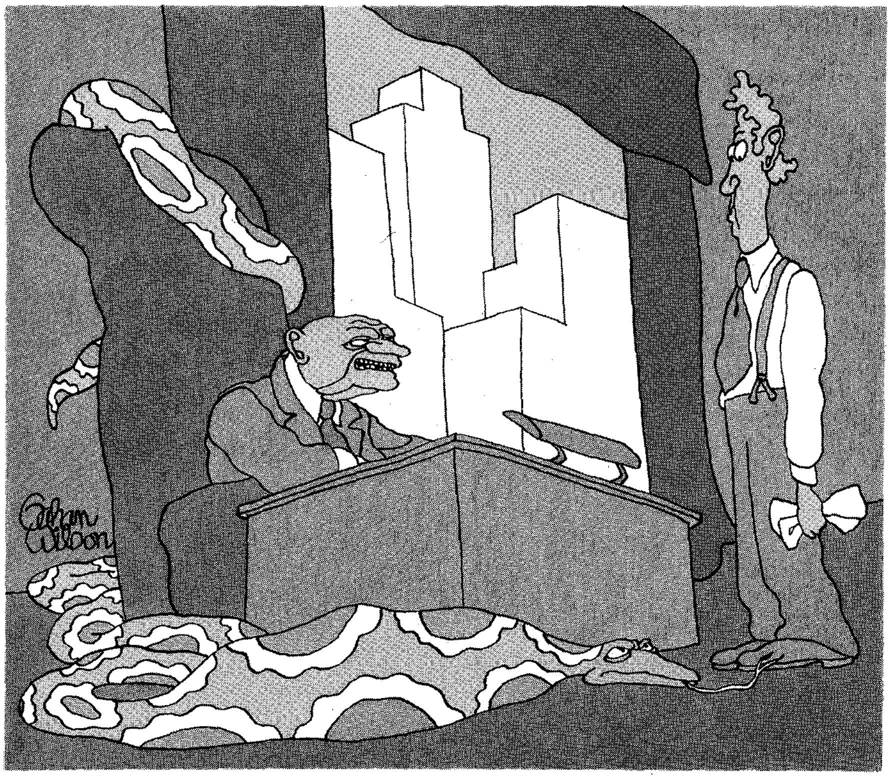
Mandujano was hosing down a horse under a shade tree.

"My great-grandpa's barns were built in the eighteen-seventies, and when we fixed them up, for me that was a real proud accomplishment," Lovett went on. "I understand everything has to change, but all my life I've been interested in preserving the old stuff."

Kimble asked Lovett if he wanted to have dinner in town, meaning Houston. He said he wasn't sure. He asked Mandujano to use fly spray on the Charolais bull, the one that had broken his leg.

Mandujano said he would.

"Don't get in there with him," Lovett said, and Mandujano grinned and said he wouldn't. The light was fading. The color was leaving the fields. We stood quietly for a moment, then Lovett broke the silence, saying pensively, "Progress is the hardest thing for me to accept." ♦



"She is, fortunately for you, temporarily sated."

FICTION

CHICXULUB

BY T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

My daughter is walking along the roadside late at night—too late, really, for a seventeen-year-old to be out alone, even in a town as safe as this—and it is raining, the first rain of the season, the streets slick with a fine immiscible glaze of water and petrochemicals, so that even a driver in full possession of her faculties, a driver who hadn't consumed two apple Martinis and three glasses of Hitching Post pinot noir before she got behind the wheel of her car, would have trouble keeping the thing out of the gutters and the shrubbery, off the sidewalk and *the highway median,* for Christ's sake. . . . But that's not really what I want to talk about, or not yet, anyway.

Have you heard of Tunguska? In Russia?

This was the site of the last known large-body impact on the Earth's surface, nearly a hundred years ago. Or that's not strictly accurate—the meteor, which was an estimated sixty yards across, never actually touched down. The force of its entry—the compression and superheating of the air beneath it—caused it to explode some twenty-five thousand feet above the ground, but then the term "explode" hardly does justice to the event. There was a detonation—a flash, a thunderclap—with the combustive power of eight hundred Hiroshima bombs. Thirty miles away, reindeer in their loping herds were struck dead by the blast wave, and the clothes of a hunter another thirty miles beyond that burst into flame even as he was poleaxed to the ground. Seven hundred square miles of Siberian forest were levelled in an instant. If the meteor had struck just five hours later, it would have exploded over St. Petersburg and annihilated every living thing in that glorious, baroque city. And this was only a rock. And it was only sixty yards across.

My point? You'd better get down on your knees and pray to your gods, because each year this big spinning globe we ride intersects the orbits of some twenty million asteroids, at least a thousand of which are more than half a mile in diameter.

But my daughter. She's out there in the dark and the rain, walking home. Maureen and I bought her a car, a Honda Civic, the safest thing on four wheels, but the car was used—pre-owned, in dealerspeak—and as it happens it's in the shop with transmission problems and, because she just had to see her friends and gossip and giggle and balance slick multicolored clumps of raw fish and pickled ginger on conjoined chopsticks at the mall, Kimberly picked her up and Kimberly will bring her home. Maddy has a cell phone and theoretically she could have called us, but she didn't—or that's how it appears. And so she's walking. In the rain. And Alice K. Petermann, of 16 Briar Lane, white, divorced, a Realtor with Hyperion, who has picked at a salad and left her glasses on the bar, loses control of her vehicle.

It is just past midnight. I am in bed with a book, naked, and hardly able to focus on the clustered words and rigid descending paragraphs, because Maureen is in the bathroom slipping into the sheer black negligee I bought her at Victoria's Secret for her birthday, and her every sound—the creak of the medicine cabinet on its hinges, the tap running, the susurrus of the brush at her teeth—electrifies me. I've lit a candle and am waiting for Maureen to step into the room so that I can flick off the light. We had cocktails earlier, and a bottle of wine with dinner, and we sat close on the couch and shared a joint in front of the fire, because our daughter was out and we could do that with no one the wiser. I listen to the little sounds from the bathroom, seductive sounds, maddening. I am ready. More than ready. "Hey," I call, pitching my voice low, "are you coming or not? You don't expect me to wait all night, do you?"

Her face appears in the doorway, the pale lobes of her breasts and the dark nipples visible through the clinging black silk. "Oh, are you waiting for me?" she says, making a game of it. She hovers at the door, and I can see the smile creep across her lips, the pleasure of the moment, drawing it out. "Because I thought I might go down and work in the garden for a while—it won't take long, a couple hours, maybe. You know, spread a little manure, bank up some of the mulch on the roses. You'll wait for me, won't you?"

Then the phone rings.

We stare blankly at each other through the first two rings and then Maureen says, "I'd better get it," and I say, "No, no, forget it—it's nothing. It's nobody."

But she's already moving.

"Forget it!" I shout, and her voice drifts back to me—"What if it's Maddy?"—then I watch her put her lips to the receiver and whisper, "Hello?"

The night of the Tunguska explosion the skies were unnaturally bright across Europe—as far away as London people strolled in the parks past midnight and read novels out of doors while the sheep kept right on grazing and the birds stirred uneasily in the trees. There were no stars visible, no moon—just a pale, quivering light, as if all the color had been bleached out of the sky. But, of course, that midnight glow and the fate of those unhappy Siberian reindeer were nothing at all compared to what would have happened if a larger object had invaded the Earth's atmosphere. On average, objects greater than a hundred yards in diameter strike the planet once every five thousand years, and asteroids half a mile across thunder down at intervals of three hundred thousand years. Three hundred thousand years is a long time in anybody's book. But if—when—such a collision occurs, the explosion will be in the million-megaton range and will cloak the atmosphere in dust, thrusting the entire planet into a deep freeze and effectively stifling all plant growth for a period of a year or more. There will be no crops. No forage. No sun.

There has been an accident, that is what the voice on the other end of the line is telling my wife, and the victim is Madeline Biehn, of 1337 Laurel Drive, according to the I.D. the paramedics found in her purse. (The purse, with a silver clasp that has been driven half an inch into the flesh under her arm by the force of the impact, is a little thing, no bigger than a hardcover book, with a ribbon-thin strap, the same purse all the girls carry, as if it were part of a uniform.) Is this her parent or guardian speaking?

I hear my wife say, "This is her mother." And then, the bottom dropping out of her voice, "Is she—?"

Is she? They don't answer such questions, don't volunteer information, not over the phone. The next ten seconds are thunderous, cataclysmic, my wife standing there numbly with the phone in her hand as if it were some unidentifiable

BERNARD FAUCON, "LA BOULE DE FEU"/AGENCE VU

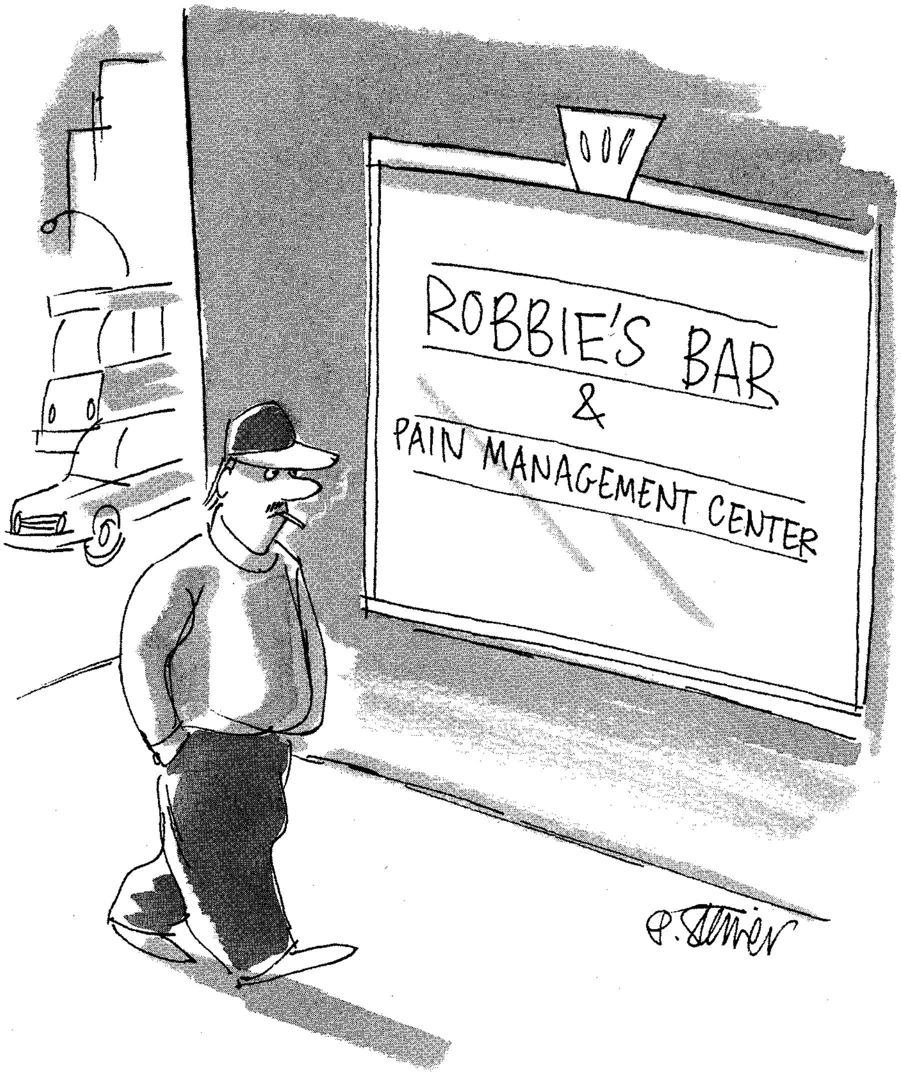
object she'd found in the street while I fumble out of bed to search for my pants—and my shoes, where are my shoes? The car keys? My wallet? This is the true panic, the loss of faith and control, the punch to the heart, and the struggle for breath. I say the only thing I can think to say, just to hear my own voice, just to get things straight: "She was in an accident. Is that what they said?"

"She was hit by a car. She's—they don't know. In surgery."

"What hospital? Did they say what hospital?"

My wife is in motion now, too, the negligee ridiculous, unequal to the task, and she jerks it over her head and flings it to the floor even as she snatches up a blouse, shorts, flip-flops—anything, anything to cover her nakedness and get her out the door. The dog is whining in the kitchen. There is the sound of rain on the roof, intensifying, hammering at the gutters. I don't bother with shoes—there are no shoes, shoes do not exist—and my shirt hangs limply from my shoulders, misbuttoned, sagging, tails hanging loose, and we're in the car now and the driver's-side wiper is beating out of synch and the night closing on us like a fist.

And then there's Chicxulub. Sixty-five million years ago, an asteroid (or perhaps a comet—no one is quite certain) collided with the Earth on what is now the Yucatán Peninsula. Judging from the impact crater, which is a hundred and twenty miles wide, the object—this big flaming ball—was some six miles across. When it came down, day became night and that night extended so far into the future that at least seventy-five per cent of all known species were extinguished, including the dinosaurs in nearly all their forms and array and some ninety per cent of the oceans' plankton, which in turn devastated the pelagic food chain. How fast was it travelling? The nearest estimates put it at fifty-four thousand miles an hour, more than sixty times the speed of a bullet. Astrophysicists call such objects "civilization enders," and calculate the chances that a disaster of this magnitude will occur during any individual's lifetime at roughly one in ten thousand, the same odds as dying in an auto accident in *the next six months*—or, more tellingly, living to be a hundred in the company of your spouse.



All I see is windows, an endless grid of lit windows climbing one above the other into the night, as the car shoots into the Emergency Vehicles Only lane and slides in hard against the curb. Both doors fling open simultaneously. Maureen is already out on the sidewalk, already slamming the door behind her and breaking into a trot, and I'm right on her heels, the keys still in the ignition and the lights stabbing at the pale underbelly of a diagonally parked ambulance—and they can have the car, anybody can have it and keep it forever, if they'll just tell me that my daughter is all right. "Just tell me," I mutter, out of breath, "just tell me and it's yours," and this is a prayer, the first in a long discontinuous string, addressed to whoever or whatever may be listening. Overhead, the sky is having a seizure, black above, quicksilver below, the rain coming down in windblown arcs, and I wouldn't even notice but for the fact that we are suddenly—instantly—wet, our hair knotted and clinging and our clothes stuck like flypaper to the slick tegument of our skin.

In we come, side by side, through the doors that jolt back from us in alarm, and all I can think is that the hospital is a death factory and that we have come to it like the walking dead, haggard, sallow, shoeless. "My daughter," I say to the nurse at the admittance desk, "she's—they called. You called. She's been in an accident."

Maureen is at my side, tugging at the fingers of one hand as if she were trying to remove an invisible glove. "A car. A car accident."

"Name?" the nurse asks. About this nurse: she's young, Filipina, with opaque eyes and the bone structure of a cadaver;

every day she sees death and it blinds her. She doesn't see us. She sees a computer screen; she sees the TV monitor mounted in the corner and the shadows that pass there; she sees the walls, the floor, the naked light of the fluorescent tube. But not us. Not us.

For one resounding moment that thumps in my ears and then thumps again, I can't remember my daughter's name—I can picture her leaning into the mound of textbooks spread out on the dining-room table, the glow of the overhead light making a nimbus of her hair as she glances up at me with a glum look and half a rueful smile, as if to say, *It's all in a day's work for a teen-ager, Dad, and you're lucky you're not in high school anymore,* but her name is gone.

"Maddy," my wife says. "Madeline Biehn."

I watch, mesmerized, as the nurse's fleshless fingers maneuver the mouse, her eyes locked on the screen before her. A click. Another click. The eyes lift to take us in, even as they dodge away again. "She's still in surgery," she says.

"Where is it?" I demand. "What room? Where do we go?"

Maureen's voice cuts in then, elemental, chilling, and it's not a question she's posing, not a statement or demand, but a plea: "What's wrong with her?"

Another click, but this one is just for show, and the eyes never move from the screen. "There was an accident," the nurse says. "She was brought in by the paramedics. That's all I can tell you."

It is then that I become aware that we are not alone, that there are others milling around the room—other zombies like us, hurriedly dressed and streaming water till the beige carpet is black with it—and why, I wonder, do I despise this nurse more than any human being I've ever encountered, this young woman not much older than my daughter, with her hair pulled back in a bun and a white cap like a party favor perched atop it, *who is just doing her job*? Why do I want to reach across the counter that separates us and awaken her to a swift, sure knowledge of hate and fear and pain? Why?

"Ted," Maureen says, and I feel her grip at my elbow, and then we're moving again—hurrying, sweeping, practically running—out of this place, down a corridor under the glare of the lights that are a kind of death in themselves, and into a worse place, a far worse place.

The thing that disturbs me about Chicxulub, aside from the fact that it erased the dinosaurs and wrought catastrophic and irreversible change, is the deeper implication that we, and all our works and worries and attachments, are so utterly inconsequential. Death cancels our individuality, we know that, yes, but ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, and the kind goes on, human life and culture succeed us. That, in the absence of God, is what allows us to accept the death of the individual. But when you throw Chicxulub into the mix—or the next Chicxulub, the Chicxulub that could come howling down to obliterate all and everything even as your eyes skim the lines of this page—where does that leave us?

"You're the parents?"

We are in another room, gone deeper now, the loudspeakers murmuring their eternal incantations—*Dr. Chandrasoma to Emergency, Dr. Bell, Paging Dr. Bell*—and here is another nurse, grimmer, older, with lines like the strings of a tobacco pouch pulled tight around her lips. She's addressing us, me and my wife, but I have nothing to say, either in denial or affirmation. If I claim Maddy as my own—and I'm making deals again—then I'm sure to jinx her, because those powers that might or might not be, those gods of the infinite and the minute, will see how desperately I love her and they'll take her away just to spite me for refusing to believe in them. *Voodoo, Hoodoo, Santería, Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.* I hear Maureen's voice, emerging from a locked vault, the single whispered monosyllable, and then: "Is she going to be all right?"

"I don't have that information," the nurse says, and her voice is neutral, robotic even. This is not her daughter. Her daughter's at home, asleep in a pile of Teddy bears, pink sheets, fluffy pillows, the night-light glowing like the all-seeing eye of a sentinel.

I can't help myself. It's that neutrality, that maddening clinical neutrality, and can't anybody take any responsibility for anything? "What information *do* you have?" I say, and maybe I'm too loud, maybe I am. "Isn't that your job, for

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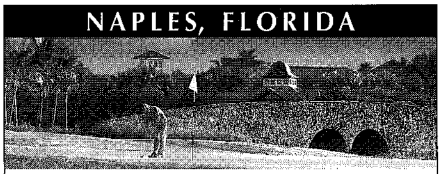

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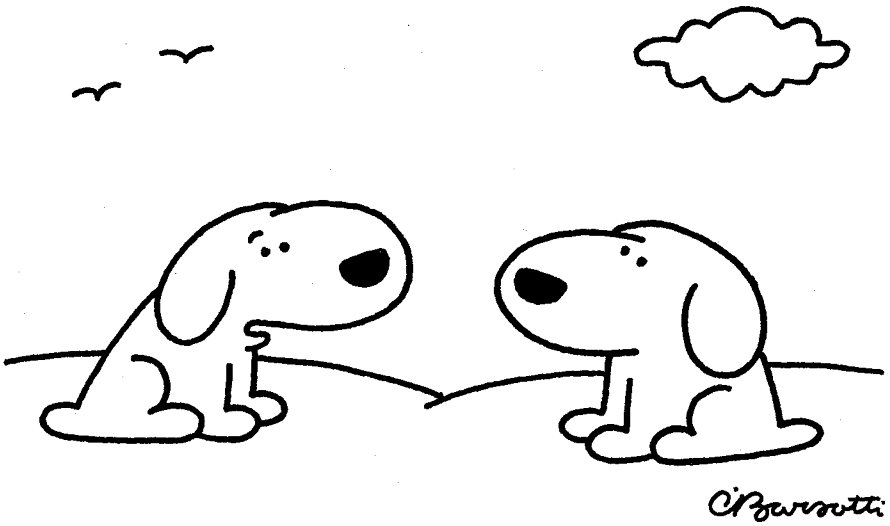


"My bark is worse than my bite, and my bark is sort of a yap."

• •

Christ's sake—to know what's going on here? You call us up in the middle of the night—our daughter's hurt, she's been in an accident, and you tell me you don't have *any fucking information*?"

People turn their heads, eyes burn into us. They're slouched in orange plastic chairs, stretched out on the floor, praying, pacing, their lips moving in silence. They want information, too. We all want information. We want news, good news: it was all a mistake, minor cuts and bruises—contusions, that's the word—and your daughter, son, husband, grandmother, first cousin twice removed will be walking through that door over there any minute. . . .

The nurse drills me with a look, and then she's coming out from behind the desk, a short woman, dumpy—almost a dwarf—and striding briskly to a door, which swings open on another room, deeper yet. "If you'll just follow me, please," she says.

Suddenly sheepish, I duck my head and comply, two steps behind Maureen. This room is smaller, an examining room, with a set of scales and charts on the walls and its slab of a table covered with a sheet of antiseptic paper. "Wait here," the nurse tells us, already shifting her weight to make her escape. "The doctor will be in in a minute."

"What doctor?" I want to know. "What for? What does he want?"

But the door has already drawn closed.

I turn to Maureen. She's standing there in the middle of the room, afraid to touch anything or to sit down or even to move for fear of breaking the spell. She's listening for footsteps, her eyes fixed on the door. I hear myself murmur her name, and then she's in my arms, sobbing, and I know I should hold her, know that we both need it, the human contact, the love and support, but all I feel is the burden of her—there is nothing and no one that can make this better, can't she see that? I don't want to console or be consoled. I don't want to be touched. I just want my daughter back.

Maureen's voice comes from so deep in her throat I can barely make out what she's saying. It takes a second to register, even as she pulls away from me, her face crumpled and red, and this is her prayer, whispered aloud: "She's going to be all right, isn't she?"

"Sure," I say, "sure she is. She'll be fine. She'll have some bruises, that's for sure, maybe a couple broken bones even . . . " and I trail off, trying to picture it, the crutches, the cast, the Band-Aids, the gauze: our daughter returned to us in a halo of shimmering light.

"Maybe she broke her arm—she could break her arm. That would— Or her leg, even her leg. But why would she be in surgery? Why would she be in surgery so long? Why? Why would that be?"

I don't have an answer to that. I don't want to have an answer.

"It was a car," Maureen says. "A car, Ted. A car hit her."

The room seems to tick and buzz with the fading energy of the larger edifice, and I can't help thinking of the congeries of wires strung inside the walls, the cables bringing power to the X-ray lab, the EKG and EEG machines, the life-support systems, and of the myriad pipes and the fluids that they drain.

A car. Three thousand pounds of steel, chrome, glass, iron.

"What was she even doing walking like that? She knows better than that."

My wife nods, the wet ropes of her hair beating at her shoulders like the flails of the penitents. "She probably had a fight with Kimberly—I'll bet that's it. I'll bet anything."

"Where is the son of a bitch?" I snarl. "This doctor—where is he?"

We are in that room, in that purgatory of a room, for a good hour or more. Twice I thrust my head out the door to give the nurse an annihilating look, but there is no news, no doctor, nothing. And then, at quarter past two, the inner door swings open, and there he is, a man too young to be a doctor, an infant with a smooth bland face and hair that rides a wave up off his brow, and he doesn't have to say a thing, not a word, because I can see what he's bringing us and my heart seizes with the shock of it. He looks to Maureen, looks to me, then drops his eyes. "I'm sorry," he says.

When it comes, the meteor will punch through the atmosphere and strike the Earth in the space of a single second, vaporizing on impact and creating a fireball that will in that moment achieve temperatures of sixty thousand degrees Kelvin, or ten times the surface reading of the sun. If it is Chicxulub-size and it hits one of our landmasses, some two hundred thousand cubic kilometres of the Earth's surface will be thrust up into the atmosphere, even as the thermal radiation of the blast sets fire to the Earth's cities and forests. This will be succeeded by seismic and volcanic activity on a scale unknown in human history, and then the dark night of cosmic winter. If it should land in the sea, as the Chicxulub meteor did, it would spew superheated water into the atmosphere, instead, extinguishing the light of the sun and triggering the same scenario of seismic catastrophe and eternal winter, while simultaneously sending out a rippling ring of water three miles high to rock the continents as if they were saucers in a dishpan.

So what does it matter? What does anything matter? We are powerless. We are bereft. And the gods—all the gods of all the ages combined—are nothing but a rumor.

The gurney is the focal point in a room of gurneys, people laid out as if there'd been a war, the beaked noses of the victims poking up out of the maze of sheets like a series of topographic blips on a glaciated plain. These people are alive still, fluids dripping into their veins, machines monitoring their vital signs, nurses hovering over them like ghouls, but they'll be dead soon, all of them. That much is clear. But *the* gurney, the one against the back wall with the sheet pulled up over the impossibly small and reduced form—this is all that matters. The doctor leads us across the room, speaking in a low voice of internal injuries, a ruptured spleen, trauma, the brain stem, and I can barely control my feet.

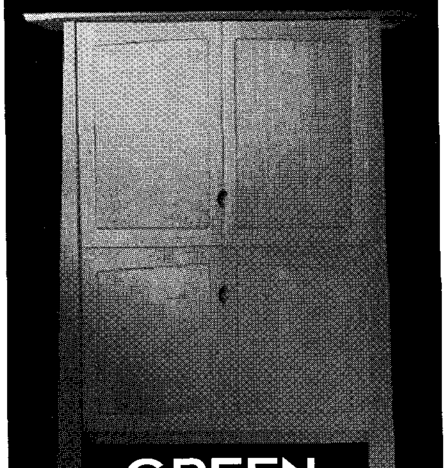
Can I tell you how hard it is to lift this sheet? Thin percale, and it might as well be made of lead, iron, iridium, might as well be the repository of all the dark matter in the universe. The doctor steps back, hands folded before him. The entire room or triage ward or whatever it is holds its breath. Maureen moves in beside me till our shoulders are touching, till I can feel the flesh and the heat of her pressing into me, and I think of this child we made together, this thing under the sheet, and the hand clenches at the end of my arm, the fingers there, prehensile, taking hold. The sheet draws back millimetre by millimetre, the slow striptease of death—and I can't do this, I can't—until Maureen lunges forward and jerks the thing off in a single violent motion.

It takes us a moment—the shock of the bloated and discolored flesh, the crusted mat of blood at the temple and the rag of the hair, this obscene violation of everything we know and expect and love—before the surge of joy hits us. Maddy is a redhead, like her mother, and though she's seventeen, she's as rangy and thin as a child, with oversized hands and feet, and she never did pierce that smooth sweet run of flesh beneath her lower lip. I can't speak. I'm rushing still with the euphoria of this new mainline drug I've discovered, soaring over the room, the hospital, the whole planet. Maureen says it for me: "This is not our daughter."

Our daughter is not in the hospital. Our daughter is asleep in her room beneath the benevolent gaze of the posters on the wall—Britney and Brad and Justin—her things scattered around her as if laid out for a rummage sale. Our daughter has in fact gone to Hana Sushi at the mall, as planned, and Kimberly has driven her home. Our daughter has, unbeknownst to us or anyone else, fudged the rules a bit—the smallest thing in the world, nothing really, the sort of thing every teen-ager does without thinking twice. She has loaned her I.D. to her second-best friend, Kristi Cherwin, because Kristi is sixteen and Kristi wants to see—is dying to see—the movie at the Cineplex with Brad Pitt in it, the one rated NC-17. Our daughter doesn't know that we've been to the hospital, doesn't know about Alice K. Petermann and the pinot noir and the glasses left on the bar, doesn't know that even now the phone is ringing at the Cherwins'.

I am sitting on the couch with a drink, staring into the ashes of the fire. Maureen is in the kitchen with a mug of Ovaltine, gazing vacantly out the window where the first streaks of light have begun to limn the trunks of the trees. I try to picture the Cherwins—they've been to the house a few times, Ed and Lucinda—and I draw a blank until a backlit scene from the past presents itself, a cookout at their place, the adults gathered around the grill with gin-and-tonics, the radio playing some forgotten song, the children, our daughters, riding their bikes up and down the cobbled drive, making a game of it, spinning, dodging, lifting the front wheels from the ground even as their hair fans out behind them and the sun crashes through the trees. Flip a coin ten times and it could turn up heads ten times in a row—or not once. The rock is coming, the new Chicxulub, hurtling through the dark and the cold to remake our fate. But not tonight. Not for me.

For the Cherwins, it's already here. ♦



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THE CRITICS

THE CURRENT CINEMA

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Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ."

BY DAVID DENBY

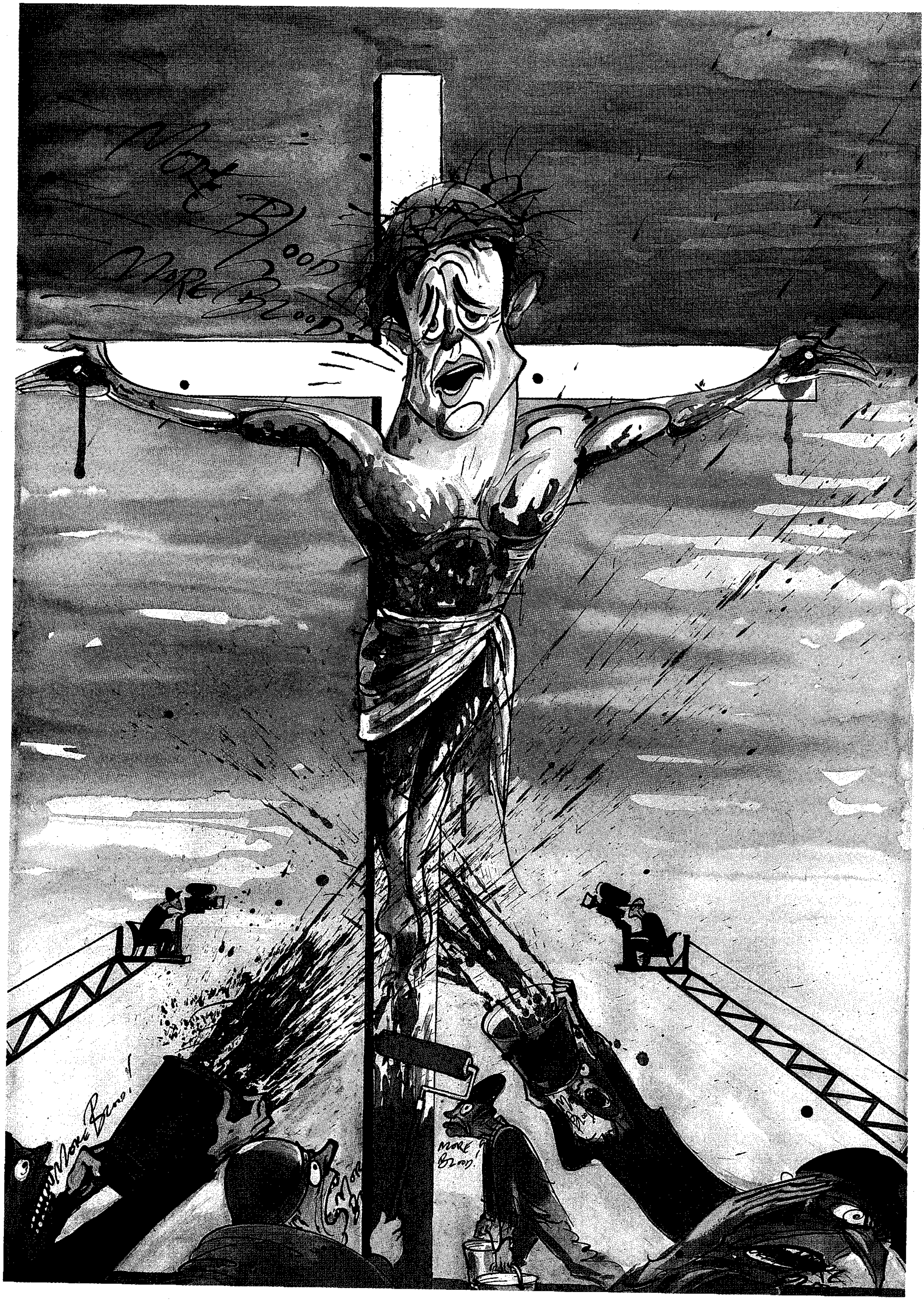
In "The Passion of the Christ," Mel Gibson shows little interest in celebrating the electric charge of hope and redemption that Jesus Christ brought into the world. He largely ignores Jesus' heart-stopping eloquence, his startling ethical radicalism and personal radiance—Christ as a "paragon of vitality and poetic assertion," as John Updike described Jesus' character in his essay "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew." Cecil B. De Mille had his version of Jesus' life, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Martin Scorsese had theirs, and Gibson, of course, is free to skip over the incomparable glories of Jesus' temperament and to devote himself, as he does, to Jesus' pain and martyrdom in the last twelve hours of his life. As a viewer, I am equally free to say that the movie Gibson has made from his personal obsessions is a sickening death trip, a grimly unilluminating procession of treachery, beatings, blood, and agony—and to say so without indulging in "anti-Christian sentiment" (Gibson's term for what his critics are spreading). For two hours, with only an occasional pause or gentle flashback, we watch, stupefied, as a handsome, strapping, at times half-naked young man (James Caviezel) is slowly tortured to death. Gibson is so thoroughly fixated on the scourging and crushing of Christ, and so meagrely involved in the spiritual meanings of the final hours, that he falls in danger of altering Jesus' message of love into one of hate.

And against whom will the audience direct its hate? As Gibson was completing the film, some historians, theologians, and clergymen accused him of emphasizing the discredited charge that it was the ancient Jews who were primarily responsible for killing Jesus, a claim that has served as the traditional justification for the persecution of the Jews in Europe for nearly two millennia. The critics turn out to have been right. Gibson is guilty of some serious mischief in his handling of these issues. But he may have also committed an aggression against Christian believers. The movie has been hailed as a religious experience by various Catholic and Protestant groups, some of whom, with an ungodly eye to the commercial realities of film distribution, have prepurchased blocks of tickets or rented theatres to insure "The Passion" a healthy opening weekend's business. But how, I wonder, will people become better Christians if they are filled with the guilt, anguish, or loathing that this movie may create in their souls?

"The Passion" opens at night in the Garden of Gethsemane—a hushed, misty grotto bathed in a purplish disco light. Softly chanting female voices float on the soundtrack, accompanied by electronic shrieks and thuds. At first, the movie looks like a graveyard horror flick, and then, as Jewish temple guards show up bearing torches, like a faintly tedious art film. The Jews speak in Aramaic, and the Romans speak in Latin; the movie is subtitled in English. Gibson distances the dialogue from us, as if Jesus' famous words were only incidental and the visual spectacle—Gibson's work as a director—were the real point. Then the beatings begin: Jesus is punched and slapped, struck with chains, trussed, and dangled over a wall. In the middle of the night, a hasty trial gets under way before Caiaphas (Mattia Sbragia) and other Jewish priests. Caiaphas, a cynical, devious, petty dictator, interrogates Jesus, and then turns him over to the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate (Hristo Naumov Shopov), who tries again and again to spare Jesus from the crucifixion that the priests demand. From the movie, we get the impression that the priests are either merely envious of Jesus' spiritual power or inherently and inexplicably vicious. And Pilate is not the bloody governor of history (even Tiberius paused at his crimes against the Jews) but a civilized and humane leader tormented by the burdens of power—he holds a soulful discussion with his wife on the nature of truth.

Gibson and his screenwriter, Benedict Fitzgerald, selected and enhanced incidents from the four Gospels and collated them into a single, surpassingly violent narrative—the scourging, for instance, which is mentioned only in a few phrases in Matthew, Mark, and John, is drawn out to the point of excruciation and beyond. History is also treated selectively. The writer Jon Meacham, in a patient and thorough article in *Newsweek*, has detailed the many small ways that Gibson disregarded what historians know of the period, with the effect of assigning greater responsibility to the Jews, and less to the Romans, for Jesus' death. Meacham's central thesis, which is shared by others, is that the priests may have been willing to sacrifice Jesus—whose mass following may have posed a threat to Roman governance—in order to deter Pilate from crushing the Jewish community altogether. It's also possible that the temple élite may have wanted to get rid of the leader of a new sect, but only Pilate had the authority to order a crucifixion—a very public event that was designed to be a warning to potential rebels. Gibson ignores most of the dismaying political context, as well as the likelihood that the Gospel writers, still under

GERALD SCARFE


More Blood
More Blood
More Blood!
More Blood!

Roman rule, had very practical reasons to downplay the Romans' role in the Crucifixion. It's true that when the Roman soldiers, their faces twisted in glee, go to work on Jesus, they seem even more depraved than the Jews. But, as Gibson knows, history rescued the pagans from eternal blame—eventually, they came to their senses and saw the light. The Emperor Constantine converted in the early fourth century, and Christianized the empire, and the medieval period saw the rise of the Roman Catholic Church. So the Romans' descendants triumphed, while the Jews were cast into darkness and, one might conclude from this movie, deserved what they got. "The Passion," in its confused way, confirms the old justifications for persecuting the Jews, and one somehow doubts that Gibson will make a sequel in which he reminds the audience that in later centuries the Church itself used torture and execution to punish not only Jews but heretics, non-believers, and dissidents.

I realize that the mere mention of historical research could exacerbate the awkward breach between medieval and modern minds, between literalist belief and the weighing of empirical evidence. "John was an eyewitness," Gibson has said. "Matthew was there." Well, they may have been there, but for decades it's been a commonplace of Biblical scholarship that the Gospels were written forty to seventy years after the death of Jesus, and not by the disciples but by nameless Christians using both written and oral sources. Gibson can brush aside the work of scholars and historians because he has a powerful weapon at hand—the cinema—with which he can create something greater than argument; he can create faith. As a moviemaker, Gibson is not without skill. The sets, which were built in Italy, where the movie was filmed, are far from perfect, but they convey the beauty of Jerusalem's courtyards and archways. Gibson, working with the cinematographer Caleb Deschanel, gives us the ravaged stone face of Calvary, the gray light at the time of the Crucifixion, the leaden pace of the movie's spectacular agonies. Felliniesque tormenters gambol and jeer on the sidelines, and, at times, the whirl of figures around Jesus, both hostile and friendly, seems held in place by a kind of magnetic force. The hounding and suicide of the betrayer Judas is accomplished in a few brusque strokes. Here and there, the movie has a dismal, heavy-souled power.

By contrast with the dispatching of Judas, the lashing and flaying of Jesus goes on forever, prolonged by Gibson's punishing use of slow motion, sometimes with Jesus' face in the foreground, so that we can see him writhe and howl. In the climb up to Calvary, Caviezel, one eye swollen shut, his mouth open in agony, collapses repeatedly in slow motion under the weight of the Cross. Then comes the Crucifixion itself, dramatized with a curious fixation on the technical details—an arm pulled out of its socket, huge nails hammered into hands, with Caviezel jumping after each whack. At that point, I said to myself, "Mel Gibson has lost it," and I was reminded of what other writers have pointed out—that Gibson, as an actor, has been beaten, mashed, and disembowelled in many of his movies. His obsession with pain, disguised by religious feelings, has now reached a frightening apotheosis.

Mel Gibson is an extremely conservative Catholic who rejects the reforms of the Second Vatican council. He's against complacent, feel-good Christianity, and, judging from his movie, he must despise the grandiose old Hollywood kitsch of "The Robe," "The King of Kings," "The Greatest Story Ever Told," and "Ben-Hur," with their Hallmark twinkling skies, their big stars treading across sacred California sands, and their lamblike Jesus, whose simple presence overwhelms Charlton Heston. But saying that Gibson is sincere doesn't mean he isn't foolish, or worse. He can rightly claim that there's a strain of morbidity running through Christian iconography—one thinks of the reliquaries in Roman churches and the bloody and ravaged Christ in Northern Renaissance and German art, culminating in such works as Matthias Grünewald's 1515 "Isenheim Altarpiece," with its thorned Christ in full torment on the Cross. But the central tradition of Italian Renaissance painting left Christ relatively unscathed; the artists emphasized not the physical suffering of the man but the sacrificial nature of his death and the astonishing mystery of his transformation into godhood—the Resurrection and the triumph over carnality. Gibson instructed Deschanel to make the movie look like the paintings of Caravaggio, but in Caravaggio's own "Flagellation of Christ" the body of Jesus is only slightly marked. Even Goya, who hardly shrank from dismemberment and pain in his work, created a "Crucifixion" with a nearly unblemished Jesus. Crucifixion, as the Romans used it, was meant to make a spectacle out of degradation and suffering—to humiliate the victim through the apparatus of torture. By embracing the Roman pageant so openly, using all the emotional resources of cinema, Gibson has cancelled out the redemptive and transfiguring power of art. And by casting James Caviezel, an actor without charisma here, and then feasting on his physical destruction, he has turned Jesus back into a mere body. The depictions in "The Passion," one of the cruellest movies in the history of the cinema, are akin to the bloody Pop representation of Jesus found in, say, a roadside shrine in Mexico, where the addition of an Aztec sacrificial flourish makes the passion a little more passionate. Such are the traps of literal-mindedness. The great modernist artists, aware of the danger of kitsch and the fascination of sadomasochism, have largely withdrawn into austerity and awed abstraction or into fervent humanism, as in Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988), which features an existential Jesus sorely tried by the difficulty of the task before him. There are many ways of putting Jesus at risk and making us feel his suffering.

What is most depressing about "The Passion" is the thought that people will take their children to see it. Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," not "Let the little children watch me suffer." How will parents deal with the pain, terror, and anger that children will doubtless feel as they watch a man flayed and pierced until dead? The despair of the movie is hard to shrug off, and Gibson's timing couldn't be more unfortunate: another dose of death-haunted religious fanaticism is the last thing we need. ♦

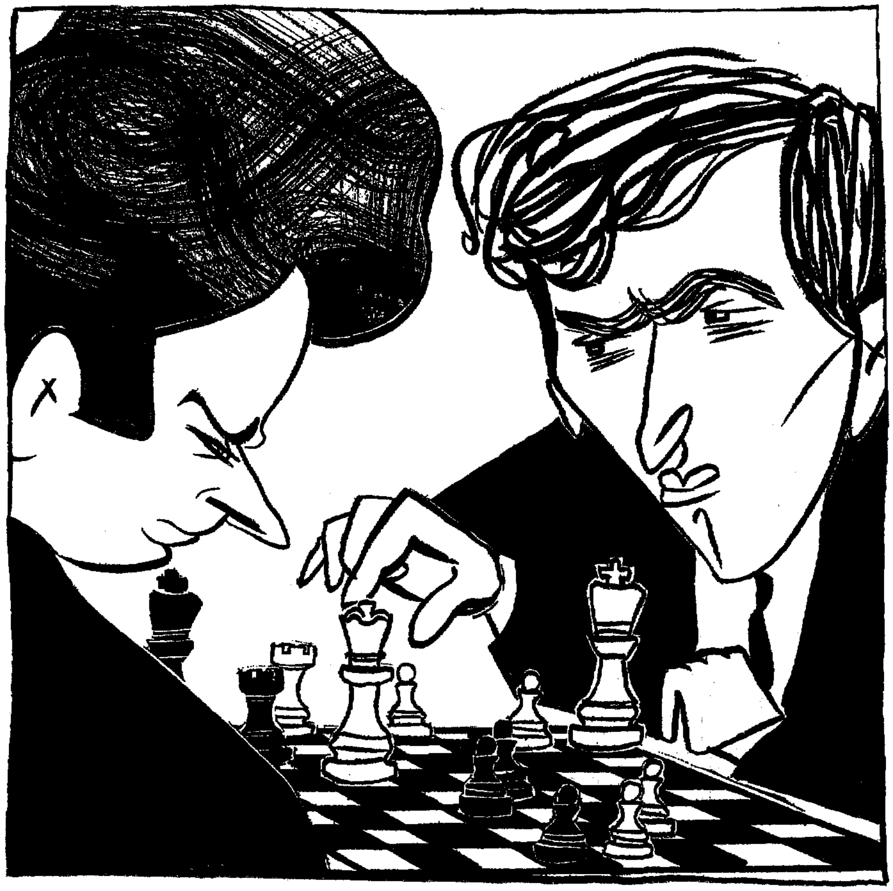
GAME THEORY

Spassky vs. Fischer revisited.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Chess is not friendly to prose. Chess is, after all, a sport, but there is almost no way to convey what's exciting about it to people who are not themselves deep students of the game. "Then, on move 21, came Black's crusher: a6!"—totally opaque, as are references to the Najdorf Variation of the Sicilian Defense, the Giuoco Piano, and the Queen's Gambit Declined. You can ignore the technical stuff and write about powerful queenside attacks, hammering rook assaults, intense positional struggle, and so on; but the truth is that the game *is* the technical stuff. A move that counts as dramatic is a move disclosed after an exhaustive analysis of all other possible moves, and the analysis can take forty minutes or more. Then someone reaches out and pushes a little piece of wood two inches. To readers who have not pondered the alternatives themselves, and who already think that the huddles in football take too long, it's hard to communicate the thrill.

There is also the artificial-intelligence problem, and it's not trivial. If the "best" move is simply the result of multiple calculations, why isn't the best chess player the one whose brain is most like a computer? Why isn't rooting for a chess player like rooting for a microchip? Commentators talk about a player's daring or originality; but a daring or original move is worthless if it's not also, from a strictly computational point of view, the optimal move—in which case, a computer could have made it. Since there is so little to look at otherwise, the players' styles and personalities come to seem important to describe. But what does style or personality have to do with it, really?



The frenzy surrounding the match must have been due to something besides the chess.

TOM BACHTELL

An activity this resistant to the usual blandishments of sports journalism attracts public attention only when something besides chess seems to be at stake. No other chess match has ever come close to attracting the kind of attention that the 1972 world-championship match, between Boris Spassky and Bobby Fischer, did. It was advertised as "the Match of the Century." It inspired a pop song, "The Ballad of Bobby Fischer," performed by Joe Glazer and his Fianchettoed Bishops. Fischer's face was on the cover of *Life*, the *Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Der Spiegel*. *Life* reported on the match. Arthur Koestler wrote about it. So did George Steiner, for *The New Yorker*. Books were published about Fischer's most famous games. People who knew nothing about chess history started referring casually to Fischer's queen sacrifice on the seventeenth move of his Grünfeld Defense against Donald Byrne in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Tournament in 1956, when Fischer was thirteen. The three American networks sent a correspondent each to Iceland to cover the match. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh allowed to journalists that he was a chess enthusiast. In Belgrade, the positions were shown on a screen in the public square. The games were covered as news in Italy, Great Britain, Argentina.

Many books were published about the match. A new account, "Bobby Fischer Goes to War: How the Soviets Lost the Most Extraordinary Chess Match of All Time" (Ecco; $24.95), has been written by David Edmonds and John Eidinow, whose book about a quarrel between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Popper, "Wittgenstein's Poker," was popular when it came out, a couple of years ago. The authors seem to have started off in the belief that since chess, a game they give no indication of knowing a great deal about, is normally an esoteric pastime, the frenzy surrounding the Fischer-Spassky match must have been due to something besides the chess.

Both Fischer and Spassky had been on the international chess scene for some time when they met, in Reykjavík, to play for the world title. Spassky had won the crown in 1969, by beating his fellow-Soviet Tigran Petrosian. Petrosian had

BRIEFLY NOTED

Seafaring

Castles of Steel, *by Robert K. Massie (Random House; $35).* In "Dreadnought," Massie chronicled the buildup of the British and German navies in the years before the First World War. Here he continues the story, showing the fleets in preparation for their inevitable decisive engagement. When the clash finally came, in 1916, at the Battle of Jutland, it was a somewhat muddled affair and both sides claimed victory. This centerpiece battle springs to life, thanks to Massie's clear grasp of tactics and his suspenseful narration. His portraits of major figures—including Winston Churchill, then a brash First Lord of the Admiralty, and the death-haunted Admiral von Spee—are perceptive and enthralling, and he writes of war's casualties with grim directness. Jutland marks a fascinating juncture in naval warfare: when the gentlemanly sea battle gave way to a more technical type of encounter. Submarines, which the British considered "the weapon of cowards," had already begun to dominate. Massie poignantly describes the sailors on older ships, who, when they spotted a modern cruiser on the horizon, knew that they were doomed, hours before the enemy fired a shot.

The Land That Never Was, *by David Sinclair (Da Capo; $26).* In 1822 and 1823, some two hundred and fifty emigrants set sail from England for the shores of Poyais, in South America. That country, however, was the invention of a con man called Sir Gregor MacGregor. He had arrived in London, claiming to be the ruler of Poyais, and had published a leather-bound guidebook, filled with maps and crop statistics, to encourage families to settle there. The consequences of his audacious hoax were dire: most of the voyagers died, stranded on an inhospitable coast. Sinclair shows how MacGregor's early experiences as a mercenary taught him skills that proved crucial in his career as a confidence man. He was so persuasive that some of the surviving settlers testified in an affidavit to his worthy intentions.

Ancient Mariner, *by Ken McGoogan (Carroll & Graf; $25).* Although he began his career as a sailor, Samuel Hearne is better known as the first European to make an overland excursion across northern Canada to the Arctic Ocean, an exploit that he chronicled in a posthumously published journal. McGoogan's account of Hearne's service in the Royal Navy and of his years working for the Hudson's Bay Company sets out to burnish the explorer's reputation as a humanist, anthropologist, and literary pioneer. The detailed narrative of Hearne's trek north with a band of Dene Indians is absorbing, despite the insertion of some clumsily dramatized scenes. But McGoogan fails to make the case for his most arresting claim: that Hearne's compulsive recounting of a massacre he once witnessed inspired the figure of the haunted sailor in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Cork Boat, *by John Pollack (Pantheon; $21).* In the summer of 2002, a strange vision appeared on the Douro River, in Portugal: a Viking ship constructed from more than a hundred and sixty-five thousand wine corks, and held together entirely by rubber bands. Its skipper, the author of this quirky adventure, had become disillusioned three years earlier by his job in Washington, D.C., and had decided to fulfill a childhood dream of building a cork boat. He teamed up with an architect, recruited a hundred volunteers to do hard manual labor, and ultimately won sponsorship for a launch in Portugal. The author's experience as a White House speechwriter shows in the way he shapes his odyssey into the tale of an underdog, dismissed as an idealist, who succeeds against all odds. It's corny, but it works: as the boat bobs down the Douro to the cheers of the crowd, Pollack's absurd quest seems not merely charming but heroic.

been the world champion since 1963, the successor to a line of Soviet champions going back to 1948, when Mikhail Botvinnik took the title that had been held by Alexander Alekhine (a Russian, but an anti-Soviet exile). Fischer had qualified for the match by winning six games in a row, with no draws, against Mark Taimanov, a Soviet player, and six games in a row against Bent Larsen, a Danish grand master regarded as the best non-Soviet player after Fischer, and then beating Petrosian by winning five of the nine games they played (three were draws). Fischer had lost one game in three matches against the strongest players, apart from one, in the world. It was said to have been the greatest run in the history of the sport. President Nixon sent a congratulatory letter.

Fischer had never beaten Spassky head to head. Plus, he had a distinctly borderline personality. From an early age, he had been the chess-world equivalent of a hotel-room-destroying rock star. At nearly every tournament, he complained about the accommodations, he complained about the lighting, he complained about the audience. Most of all, he complained about the money. He was apparently of the view that, since he behaved like a rock star, he ought to be paid like one. We are not talking about vast sums. When Spassky won five thousand dollars in a tournament in Santa Monica, the rest of the Soviet chess establishment was sick with resentment. Fischer's financial demands set off a bidding war for the honor of hosting the world-championship match. Iceland, to its subsequent regret, emerged the winner, after Belgrade, concerned that Fischer wouldn't show up, pulled out—and, even then, a British tycoon named James Slater had to double the prize money, to a quarter of a million dollars, before Fischer could be induced to play. (The winner got roughly two-thirds.) Fischer stalled: about to board a plane for Iceland, he fled Kennedy Airport and hid out in a friend's house in Queens. The start of the match had to be postponed. Henry Kissinger phoned Fischer to talk him into going. At some point during all this, the rest of the planet got hooked on the story.

One possible reason for the world's interest was the Cold War, and for most of their book Edmonds and Eidinow play up the Cold War aspects of the match. This makes it a little surprising when, at the end, they discount the whole idea. They're perfectly right to do so. American officials, on their side, regarded Fischer mainly with fear and loathing. Kissinger's intervention seems to have been motivated by personal interest in the game, rather than by grand strategy. The State Department informed the American chargé d'affaires in Reykjavík to spend no government resources on Fischer's behalf, and the chargé's own deepest desire was to get Fischer off the island as quickly as possible. Publicly, sentiment in the United States was divided on Fischer, but more or less the way it was divided, during the same period, on Muhammad Ali or, an even better comparison, Evel Knievel. He was definitely a rude fellow, but maybe there was something cool about him. He was tall (six-three); he was physical at the board, snatching pieces off it when he captured them; he wore glitter-green suits with padded shoulders. He was plausibly a certain type of American antihero: rebel, exact cause to be determined.

And, on the other side, Spassky was far from a typical Soviet-era athlete. He was a patriot, but a Russian patriot. He hated the Bolsheviks and had little respect for the Soviet system (though he was careful to extract the rewards to which he believed his accomplishments as a sportsman entitled him). It gave him pleasure to ignore advice offered by Soviet officials, and in Iceland he made his seconds and other handlers miserable with frustration by his insistence on doing things his own way. He later married, for the third time, and moved to Paris. Fischer hated the Soviets—"Commie cheaters," as he called them—but his understanding of the philosophical differences between the two sides was not great. He thought that Soviet players cheated in tournaments by agreeing to easy draws when they played against each other in order to preserve their energy for games against foreigners, and he wanted to use Iceland to take his revenge. He was not thinking like a diplomat. He was thinking like a high-school student.

The incentive to write another book on the Fischer-Spassky match seems to have been the opportunity to see government documents from the period—F.B.I. files on Fischer and Soviet files on Spassky and on the match itself. There are a lot of files, but they don't tell us much. The F.B.I. was interested, for many years, in Fischer's parents, whom it suspected of being Communists, but this interest does not seem to have had any effect on Fischer himself or on the championship. The K.G.B. took more interest in the match than the F.B.I. did, though we have to remember that K.G.B. agents were playing for Spassky mainly the role that the cadre of lawyers and other advisers surrounding Fischer played for the American. They were protecting their client. This involved nutty chores like taking the fruit juice Spassky was being served in Iceland to Moscow for chemical analysis, to see whether he was being doped, and X-raying Fischer's chair, looking for transmission devices. Edmonds and Eidinow speculate vigorously, but they can't find any proof that the K.G.B., or anyone on Fischer's team, did anything underhanded. They also conclude, somewhat reluctantly, that official Soviet involvement in the match was not unusually intense, and that the press coverage was entirely non-ideological. This was, they properly note, a period of superpower détente. In spite of a good deal of analogy-hunting ("As the match ground on, Nixon became engaged in his own desperate game of chess making move after move to save his presidential skin," they observe, to no particular purpose), the authors do not come up with a novel explanation for why the match was the worldwide sensation it was.

Since Edmonds and Eidinow essentially finesse the games themselves, avoiding technical analyses and relying mostly on the characterizations of various experts, there is not much left to the story but tears and rage. In every respect but one, the match was a fiasco—"a world-shatteringly silly event," as one participant, a lawyer for Fischer, later put it. Fischer arrived late for the first game and lost it when he took a poisoned pawn, one of the most elementary mistakes in chess. (He took an exposed pawn with his bishop, which was trapped after his opponent's next move.) Fischer didn't show up at all for the second game, and forfeited it. He insisted that the third game be played not in the exhibition hall, which the Icelandic Chess Federation had arranged expressly for the match, hoping to recover some of its costs by charging admission, but in a small room

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at the back of the building. Spassky, claiming indifference to location, agreed, and Fischer promptly destroyed him. Spassky never really recovered. The match was returned to the main hall, but by the tenth game Fischer had come back from 0–2 to take a 6½– 3½ lead. (Draws counted for half a point.) He coasted from there, winning the match by four points and filing abusive protests almost up until the last game. Spassky had played as though he were in a fog for the better part of the match, and phoned in his resignation. Fischer was late to the closing ceremonies; when he was handed his check, he opened it and examined it on the spot. During the speeches, which he ignored, he pulled out a pocket set and showed Spassky where he had gone wrong in the final game.

Though a percentage of television revenues had been one of Fischer's demands before the match started, the presence of television cameras in the hall became one of his most persistent causes of complaint. (It was on this ground that the third game was played in a back room.) An independent producer named Chester Fox had managed to get exclusive rights to film the proceedings. He was, on Edmonds and Eidinow's account, a persistent character, but he was no match for Fischer, and he ended up with nothing. The members of Fischer's entourage, possibly anticipating a windfall if their man won and went on to sign major book and appearance contracts, received nothing for their service. These included an Icelandic policeman, who signed on as Fischer's bodyguard, and even worked for him, in the United States, after the match. When he left to go back to Iceland, the American Chess Federation gave him five hundred dollars, which Edmonds and Eidinow say works out to three dollars a day for the time he had spent with Fischer. Back in Moscow, Spassky and his team were subjected to a humiliating postmortem, and Spassky's travel privileges were suspended (a standard Soviet response to failure in international competition). Spassky had apparently believed that he was capable of intuiting a way to beat Fischer during the match. What he realized after the third game, he later said, was that Fischer was "an animal." He hadn't calculated that variation.

After Reykjavík, and a few grudging public appearances, Fischer went off the radar screen. He refused to sign any of the contracts offered by publishers and others, and he declined to defend his championship against the next challenger, Anatoly Karpov. He was deposed in absentia in 1974. In 1992, he turned up in Yugoslavia for a rematch with Spassky; the competitors proved to be well past their primes. Fischer's presence in Yugoslavia at a time of civil war there violated an executive order; he spat publicly on the letter warning him not to play, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Edmonds and Eidinow say it is still outstanding. Fischer gave an interview on a Philippine radio station on September 11, 2001, in which he said that "America got what it deserved." He has become a vociferous anti-Semite. In the end, he revealed himself to be not a rebel or a mad genius but—what was fairly obvious all along—a delusional paranoid. His behavior in Iceland was not psychological warfare (though it may have had the effect of psychological warfare). It was simply his way of dealing with reality. "I don't believe in psychology," he told a reporter when he was holed up in Queens while Spassky waited in Iceland. "I believe in good moves." So, evidently, did Spassky, who never blamed the chaos that seemed to accompany his opponent for his own meltdown at the board. Edmonds and Eidinow quote a chess-playing psychologist, William Hartston: "Chess is not something that drives people mad; chess is something that keeps mad people sane."

The one happy effect of the 1972 championship match was the interest it excited in chess. This was due partly to Fischer's antic behavior, but mostly to television coverage of the games themselves. The BBC devoted a weekly program to the match which attracted a million viewers; in the United States, PBS covered every play of every game, and the program made a star out of an ex-sociology lecturer named Shelby Lyman, an improbable but charismatic television personality. Still, after the truth about Fischer became accepted, American enthusiasm for international chess faded. How many of the people who followed the Fischer-Spassky match as though it were one of the great soap operas of all time even know who the current world champion is? His name, for the record, is Vladimir Kramnik. ♦

BOOKS

SELECT ALL

Can you have too many choices?

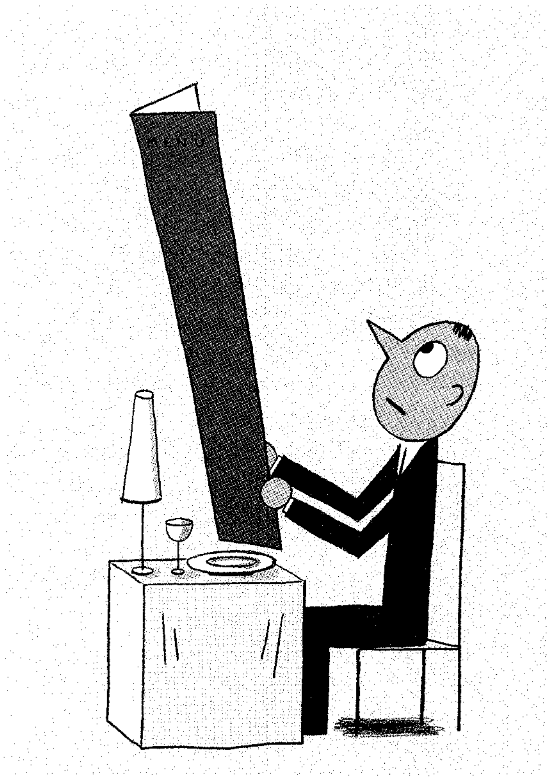
BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

A radio producer in Washington, D.C., got a promotion a few years ago on the grounds that he was a "good decision-maker." Self-deprecating to a fault, he reminded his bosses that many of the decisions he'd made since joining the station hadn't exactly worked out. They didn't care. "Being a good decision-maker means you're good at making decisions," one executive cheerily told him. "It doesn't mean you make good decisions."

This boss figured that the station had less to fear from periodic screwups than from the day-in, day-out paralysis of someone too cowed by choice to choose at all. He had a point. A few decades of research has made it clear that most people are terrible choosers—they don't know what they want, and the prospect of deciding often causes not just jitters but something like anguish. The evidence is all around us, from restaurant-goers' complaints that "the menu is too long" to Michael Jackson's face.

The phenomenon isn't new. "The ordinary man believes he is free when he is permitted to act arbitrarily, but in this very arbitrariness lies the fact that he is unfree," Hegel wrote. "Negative infinity" was his term for how the man without a well-anchored sense of self would perceive the marketplace. There can even be common ground between those who recoil from choice and those who have no choice at all, or so Louis MacNeice implied in a poem from the nineteen-forties about drunks:

> Those Haves who cannot bear making a choice,
> Those Have-nots who are bored with having nothing to choose,
> Call for their drinks in the same tone of voice,
> Find a factitious popular front in booze.



A "preference" is a prediction, and often a wrong one.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

Researchers of cognitive dissonance in the nineteen-fifties found that consumers would continue to read ads for a new car after they'd bought it but would avoid information about other brands, fearing post-purchase misgivings. And in the early eighties the social thinker Albert O. Hirschman, in "Shifting Involvements," sought to introduce the concept of "disappointment" into mainstream economic theory. "*The world I am trying to understand,*" he wrote (and the desperate italics are in the original), "*is one in which men think they want one thing and then upon getting it, find out to their dismay that they don't want it nearly as much as they thought or don't want it at all and that something else, of which they were hardly aware, is what they really want.*"

Mischoosing of this kind is what Barry Schwartz, a social scientist at Swarthmore, has in mind in his new book, "The Paradox of Choice" (Ecco; $23.95). In his view, "unlimited choice" can "produce genuine suffering." Schwartz makes his case mostly through research in psychology and behavioral economics—research that shows how far real people are from the perfectly rational "utility maximizers" posited by classical economists.

In the real world, neither people nor firms maximize utility. Life is complicated, the options of the marketplace are numerous, and the human intellect is frail. As Herbert Simon, the 1978 Nobel laureate in economics, observed, any firm that tried to make decisions that would "maximize" its returns would bankrupt itself in a never-ending search for the best option. What firms do instead is "satisfice," to use Simon's term: they content themselves with results that are "good enough." Schwartz, who is a close reader of Simon, worries that the profusion of choices we face—a hundred varieties of bug spray, breakfast cereal, extra-virgin olive oil—is turning us into maximizers, and maximizers, he thinks, are prone to misery and depression.

Schwartz looks at the particular patterns of our irrationality, relying on the sort of research pioneered by two Israeli-American psychologists, Daniel Kahneman and the late Amos Tversky. It turns out, for instance, that people will often consciously choose against their own happiness. Tversky and a colleague once asked subjects whether they'd prefer to be making thirty-five thousand dollars a year while those around them were making thirty-eight thousand or thirty-three thousand while those around them were making thirty thousand. They answered, in effect, that it depends on what the meaning of the word "prefer" is. Sixty-two per cent said they'd be happier in the latter case, but eighty-four per cent said they'd choose the former.

Research in the wake of Kahneman and Tversky has unearthed a number of conundrums around choice. For one thing, choice can be "de-motivating." In a study conducted several years ago, shoppers who were offered free samples of six different jams were more likely to buy one than shoppers who were offered free samples of twenty-four. This result seems irrational—surely you're more apt to find something you like from a range four times as large—but it can be replicated in a variety of contexts. Students who are offered six topics they can write about for extra credit, for instance, are more likely to write a paper than students who are offered thirty.

Why should this be? Schwartz suggests that it has to do with the irrational way people measure "opportunity costs." Instead of calculating opportunity cost as the value of the single most attractive foregone alternative, we seem to assemble an idealistic composite of all the options foregone. A wider range of slightly inferior options, then, can make it harder to settle on one you're happy with. Similarly, when people direct their wants toward "classes" of goals, they tend to figure they'll get a better-than-average example of the class. When a person says, "I feel like a plate of spaghetti," he envisions a particularly good plate of spaghetti. And, as the psychologists Daniel Gilbert, of Harvard, and Timothy Wilson, of the University of Virginia, have observed, "If it is difficult to know whether we will be happy fifteen minutes after eating a bite of spaghetti, it is all the more difficult to know whether we will be happy fifteen months after a divorce or fifteen years after a marriage."

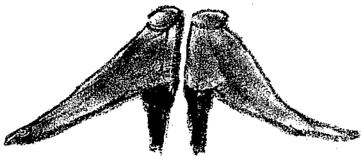
There are even cases, as Schwartz notes, where just one additional choice can produce outright paralysis. Tversky and the young Princeton psychologist Eldar Shafir asked experimental subjects how they would react to a desirable Sony appliance placed in a shop-window, radically marked down. The offer met with predictable enthusiasm. When a second appliance, similarly marked down, was placed alongside the bargain Sony, enthusiasm—and sales—dropped. Some hypothetical customers were evidently frozen by indecision.

You might wonder how much these sorts of findings should really concern us. Even if there were some raging epidemic of buyer's remorse, strangers to the mall hardly need worry. But who is a stranger to the mall nowadays? Ours is a consumer culture that promises to liberate us to the extent that we can buy what we please; any evidence that we are poor choosers is a blow to its foundations.

Nor is the "paradox of choice" limited to the shopping aisle. It helps explain why so many people at age thirty are still flailing about, trying to choose a career—and why so many marriageable singles wind up alone. You await a spouse who combines the kindness of your mom, the wit of the smartest person you met in grad school, and the looks of someone you dated in 1983 (as she was in 1983) . . . and you wind up spending middle age by yourself, watching the Sports Channel at 2 A.M. in a studio apartment strewn with pizza boxes.

A central problem of choice is what Wilson and Gilbert call "miswanting." Wanting, in their definition, is "a prediction of liking." Predictions are often biased, and predictions of one's feelings are more biased than most. Current preferences "contaminate" future plans—so that, on weekly trips to the supermarket, customers who have just eaten tend to buy too little food, and hungry ones too much. You might try to draw on experience to help you choose, but your memories aren't to be trusted. As Kahneman has shown, our minds focus on the peak and the final moments of a past experience while crowding out memories of its duration.

Given that we're so bad at choosing what will make us happy, we seem to be faced with two options: mending the way we choose, or limiting our choices. Schwartz, in an effort to help us mend our ways, applies to individual shoppers Simon's distinction between maximizing and satisficing. A maximizer is someone who "can't be certain that she has found the best sweater unless she's looked at all the sweaters," Schwartz writes. "She can't know that she is getting the best price until she's checked out all the prices." Instead, he says, one should become a satisficer, "content with the merely excellent as opposed to the absolute best." It's not obvious that you can simply decide to convert from maximizing to satisficing. But Schwartz, though he distrusts American abundance, has a deeply American faith in our ability to refashion ourselves.



What about the other approach—trying to choose less? In some measure, we all do this, using a strategy that the Columbia social theorist Jon Elster calls "self-binding." Like Ulysses lashing himself to the mast of his ship in order to prevent himself from succumbing to the Sirens' song, people make the choice of limiting their choices. Gilbert and Wilson note that there is one exception to the rule that hungry people overbuy and sated people underbuy at supermarkets: it's people who bring a grocery list, which the two psychologists call "a copy of *A Theory About What I Will Want in the Future*." Strategies like this can be carried out at the level of society, by rules or social sanction, and surely help to explain Americans' extraordinary flight from addictive behavior in recent years—so sudden that it resembles a concert-hall panic. In 1965, even after the Surgeon General's report linking smoking to lung cancer, forty-two per cent of Americans smoked. Today, the figure has been cut roughly in half. Societal self-binding, rather than just new information, deserves much of the credit. (Or, if you like, the blame.)

Elster rightly insists that an individual's binding of himself is a very different kind of "pre-commitment" from lawmakers' binding of others—as different as resolution and coercion. But if choice is as painful as social scientists claim (Schwartz says it "tyrannizes" us)—and if miswanting is as prevalent—then a root-and-branch means of liberating us from it will always tempt policymakers and political thinkers. Some will advocate having others, perhaps the state, choose for people; for these advocates, behavioral economics provides a rationale for paternalism. The economist George Loewenstein, of Carnegie Mellon, has said that anyone studying happiness was bound to end up leaning left. Indeed, miswanting can be seen as a version of Marxism's "false consciousness," only in a more alluring guise—no longer just an oratorical ruse to sidestep the expressed wishes of the working class but a hard datum of social science. In a recent law-review article, the Chicago legal and political theorist Cass Sunstein and the behavioral economist Richard H. Thaler elaborate on a doctrine they call "libertarian paternalism": "Libertarian paternalists," they write, "want to promote freedom of choice, but they need not seek to provide bad options, and among the set of reasonable ones, they need not argue that more is necessarily better."

All the abstract arguments against choice become harder to make when they are translated into concrete terms. When Schwartz notes that young Americans are unduly troubled by their choice of career, because they are "remarkably unconstrained by what their parents did before them," he sounds kindhearted and sincerely concerned. But he also sounds a bit like an English nob defending the class system while he sits in a leather armchair in Boodle's in about 1926. And if Schwartz's book is really about the anguish of choice in general—and not merely about choice as a facet of shopping—there is no reason for any such argument to stop before it reaches, say, "a woman's right to choose." Once you stop taking people's expressed preferences at face value, pretty much every single contentious political, economic, sexual, familial, social, and labor issue can be opened up to unpredictable renegotiation.

There are less disruptive remedies. Robert Reich, in his recent book "The Future of Success," notes that modern consumers, like corporations, respond to the marketplace by "outsourcing" choice. They hire experts—critics, in the old way of looking at things. While many experts, such as interior decorators, offer personalized service and charge a mint, the masses have access to choosing services that are essentially free. That, in effect, is what a "brand" is.

One function of certain New Economy innovations is to make choosing easier by automating it. TiVo, in theory, allows television addicts to lose themselves in ever more programming choices, but it can also be used as a filter, a means of allowing viewers to dispense with choosing altogether. Internet grocery services, such as Peapod, allow shoppers to fill out a template that protects them from having to rechoose every week. In practical terms, the Peapod shopper is confronted with far fewer new brands and choices than was a suburban housewife pushing her cart down a grocery aisle during the Kennedy Administration.

It's also true that in a consumer society the most widespread of the misjudgments that humans bring to choice may also be a productive one. Researchers can tell us why someone can quickly become bored with a new Jaguar, or revert to thinking that life is meaningless two weeks after receiving a promotion he's sought for a decade. But the phenomenon—sometimes called the "hedonic treadmill"—can also explain why disaster, whether bankruptcy or incapacitation, seldom burdens our spirits for very long.

Strangely, we lose sight of our human resilience when we make big choices. People are consistently puzzled that so many things they had dreaded—from getting fired to being ditched by a spouse—"turned out for the best." Gilbert and Wilson even speculate (in a diplomatic way) that our inability to forecast this adaptive capacity spurs some people to a belief in God. "Because people are largely unaware that their internal dynamics promote such positive change," they write, "they look outward for an explanation." A tendency to overestimate the joy we'll get from buying baubles and winning honors is only half of a complex predisposition. The other half is our enormous capacity for happiness, even in the absence of such things. The surprise isn't how often we make bad choices; the surprise is how seldom they defeat us. ♦

CORRECTION OF THE WEEK

From the Times.

The Public Lives profile on Wednesday, about Michael Arad, an Israeli who is one of the designers of the "Reflecting Absence" memorial to be built at ground zero, misstated the location where he served in an infantry reconnaissance unit in the Israeli army. It was in the West Bank, not the Left Bank.

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Tate Modern, the Saatchi Gallery, and competing views of the contemporary.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

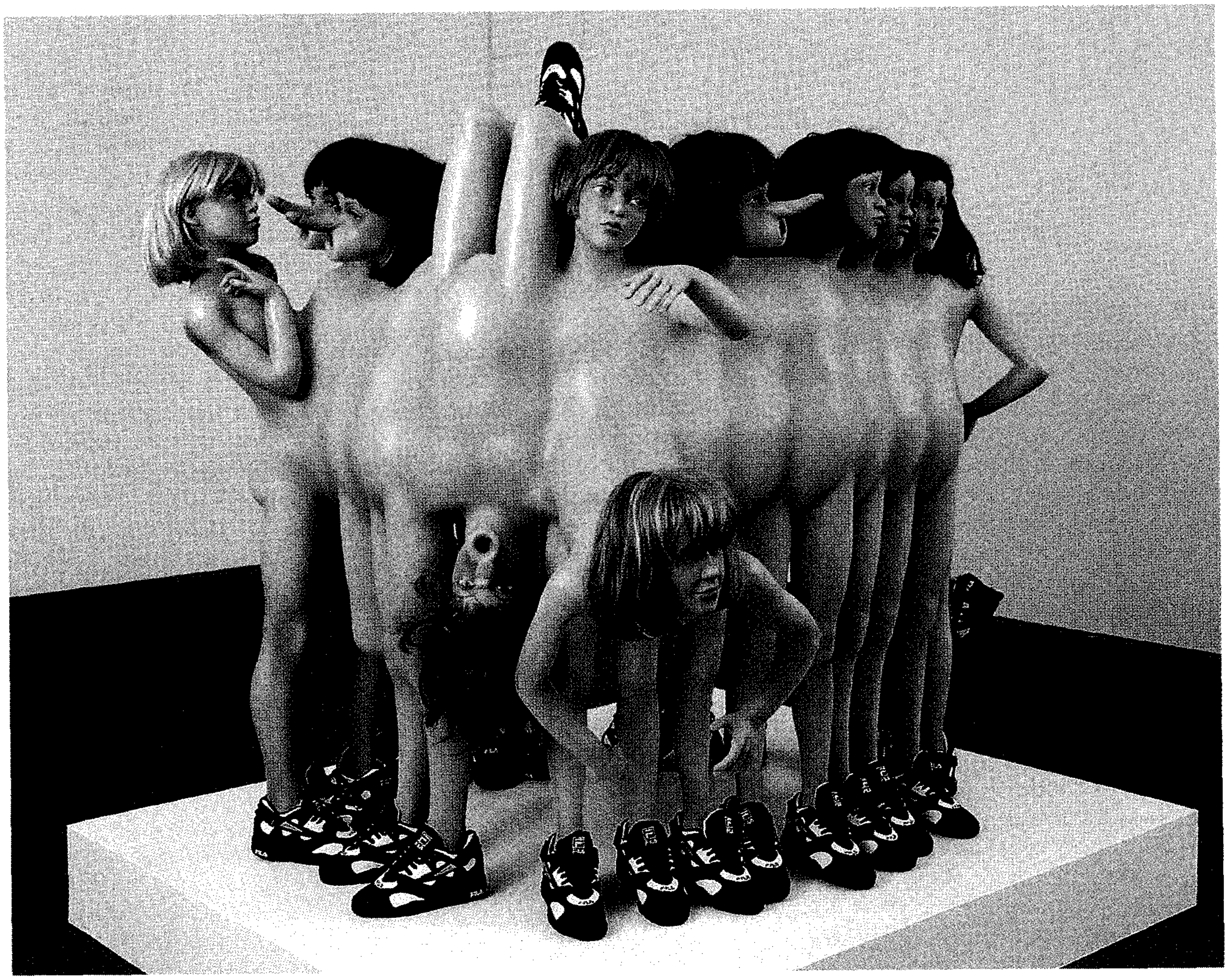
Two institutions on the south bank of the Thames express the split personality of the London art world. Dr. Jekyll is the mighty Tate Modern, which, since a fumbling start in 2000, has developed gravitas and flair to go with its crowd-fetching magnetism. At present, the cathedralesque former power plant offers handsome retrospectives of Constantin Brancusi and Donald Judd, and a smashingly successful installational work by Olafur Eliasson. In the museum's mammoth Turbine Hall, which has devoured every previous attempt to enhance it with art, Eliasson's vast "sun," made up of hundreds of monofilament lamps (which suppress all colors except yellow), sheds aureate light through gloomy air thickened by fog machines, beneath a mirrored ceiling. Viewers sprawl about on the concrete floor, apparently felled by bliss. The work feels religious, in a secular sort of way. It jibes with an increasing, distinctive tone at the museum: solemn exaltation, which has come to outweigh a lingering penchant for over-thematized, natteringly educational curating. The Brancusi and Judd exhibitions—as well as rooms of work, from the permanent collection, by Mark Rothko, Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly, Robert Smithson, Richard Deacon, and others—suggest temples to Apollo. The Judd show, tracing his career from early painting constructions through rectilinear floor and wall units to a huge, cabinetlike ensemble of plywood and Plexiglas, might be dubbed Stations of the Box. Are such vatic effects more impressive than enjoyable? Do we want museums to remind us of going to church? There's a tacit argument that the right kind of people do.

Upriver from Tate Modern, across from the Houses of Parliament, in forty thousand square feet of County Hall, is Mr. Hyde: the year-old Saatchi Gallery, teeming with determinedly scurrilous stuff by the Young British Artists, who have been the tabloid-jazzing shock troops of the London scene since the early nineteen-nineties, when they were taken up by the advertising baron and mega-collector Charles Saatchi. Intricate dioramas by Jake and Dinos Chapman of horrific jungle massacres, with thousands of tiny figures doing or suffering gory deeds, are now on show at the Saatchi, complementing other work there by the Chapmans (notably, penis-nosed and anus-mouthed mannequins of children) and representations of Tracey Emin (her soiled bed), Sarah Lucas (objects with mock sex organs), Marcus Harvey (a Chuck Close-like painting of a serial child-killer, made up of children's hand-prints), Marc Quinn (a refrigerated self-portrait head made of his own blood), Richard Billingham (photographs of his fall-down-drunk father and his obese mother), Chris Ofili (the "Holy Virgin Mary," which, in the 1999 Saatchi-backed "Sensation" show at the Brooklyn Museum, baited Mayor Rudolph Giuliani with a dollop of elephant doo), Jenny Saville (virtuosically painted grotesque nudes), and the inescapable Damien Hirst (the famous pickled shark and, among other things, a canvas slathered with a zillion dead flies). If the Saatchi has a titular god, it's Dionysus with a hangover.

"Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else," one of Oscar Wilde's characters notes. I feel the same when art is at issue in London, where I keep going into shows as a professional critic and coming out as an amateur anthropologist. Tate Modern's strenuous loftiness and the Saatchi's calculated squalor are too pronounced to represent mere orders of taste. They advance antagonistic ideas about what art should do for and/or to society. The contrast between them affects an innocent foreign visitor like sounds of breaking china from the host's kitchen during a family dinner. One is not expected to comment on the racket in the next room, let alone to intervene in whatever is going on in there—especially since, in this case, the parties involved may publicly deny being acquainted with each other, much less related. In no other country that I know of do attitudes toward art feel so hard-wired with social animus. This is not news, of course. Coded class is a cynosure of British literature, not to mention daily life. But, at a time when London is asserting itself as an international art capital, perhaps second only to New York, whiffs of internecine rancor in the town's most spectacular new institutions both disconcert and amuse.

An arriviste's arriviste, the Iraq-born, Jewish Saatchi—Margaret Thatcher's ad man, widely credited with boosting her to power—began collecting in the nineteen-seventies with his American first wife, Doris Lockhart, who favored minimalism. He then set the pace of the eighties art boom by buying out whole shows of German, Italian, and American neo-Expressionists—and subsequently selling off the work in job lots, to the indelible dismay of the artists and their supporters. (I contributed essays to a four-volume catalogue of Saatchi's holdings, which appeared in 1984. Later, my work on a projected one-volume catalogue ended in mutual ill feeling.) Group shows at Saatchi's former exhibition space at 98A Boundary Road, on London's northern fringe, served as templates for contemporary-art collectors everywhere. His fancy gradually turned to British art—established painters at first, and then, with a flourish, the cavalry charge of the Y.B.A.s. That movement's impudent precocity, in theatrical, skewer-the-bourgeois adaptations of postminimalist conventions, has never made much headway in New York; but it isn't meant for us. Its politics are local. The Y.B.A.s both provoke and revel in the reflexive, mocking philistinism of many Brits, and they make common cause with the disaffected among them, flipping the bird to establishment proprieties. The effect is a come-as-you-are saturnalia of all-around, jolly rage and loathing.

The Saatchi makes a remarkably subtle and cogent case for the tendency of the Y.B.A.s as an alternative tradition in contemporary art, supplementing those that are in force at Tate Modern. In its permanent collection, a key role is assigned to a



"Zygotic Acceleration, Biogenetic, De-Sublimated Libidinal Model" (1995), by Jake and Dinos Chapman.

SAATCHI GALLERY

relatively obscure American, the late verist sculptor Duane Hanson. Hanson's eye-fooling simulacra of lumpen American folks—a janitor, a jogger, a pair of hefty tourists—are scattered throughout the museum, reliably triggering double and triple takes. Hanson is a populist doppelgänger of the élitist Judd. Both produced "specific objects" (Judd's phrase for works that are neither painting nor sculpture) that reverse the normal polarity of the looker and the looked-at in presentations of art. Both Judd's boxes and Hanson's figures impose themselves on viewers, inducing acute self-consciousness. We become aware of our physical position and mental state in rooms whose physical and social character are suddenly vivified. Judd was an icy engineer of this effect. His commanding, perfectionist works model stern principles of design and architecture, pointing the world toward a utopia for puritans. Hanson was a rabble-rouser, flooding art space with virtual odors of real-world realities. The opposition of Judd and Hanson is a potent intellectual stimulant. It works retroactively in art history—to a notional fork in the road a half century ago that via Rothko, say, led to the high-mindedness of Tate Modern and, via the wild side of Francis Bacon, foreshadowed the guttersnipe Y.B.A.s. Should art transcend human wretchedness, or embrace it? The greatest art may do both, as witness Brancusi.

There is something a mite cheap about the Eliasson installation. It's a walk-in special effect with touchy-feely, sentimental vibrations. But it dazzles. And I hate the Chapmans, whose callow diddling with pedophilia, war, and other serious matters goes nowhere interesting, let alone valuable. But they sure do rivet your attention. The divided sensibility of art in London fosters these extremes. (Here in America, such conflicts get blurred by the liberal anxiety of our institutions to coax everything into melting-pot amity.) These thoughts coalesced for me at Tate Modern's Brancusi show, which emphasizes his egglike carvings of heads, and climaxes with an ecstatic "Bird in Space." In what now seems a lost paradise, that artist realized a seamless union of dreamy sublimity and sexy audacity—though the balance is hard to register, given the museum's bias. The show's title, "The Essence of Things," and its sparse, enshrining installation play up Brancusi's metaphysical poetry at the expense of his earthy wit. A more gregarious, gemütlich presentation of his art in a retrospective at the Philadelphia Museum of Art several years ago was truer to his signal creative achievement, which I think of as mediating between spirituality and furniture. At Tate Modern, Brancusi becomes all uplift, hold the funk. It's fun to speculate on how the Saatchi might spin him—as "The Randy Romanian," perhaps, which would be quite right in another way. ♦

THE THEATRE

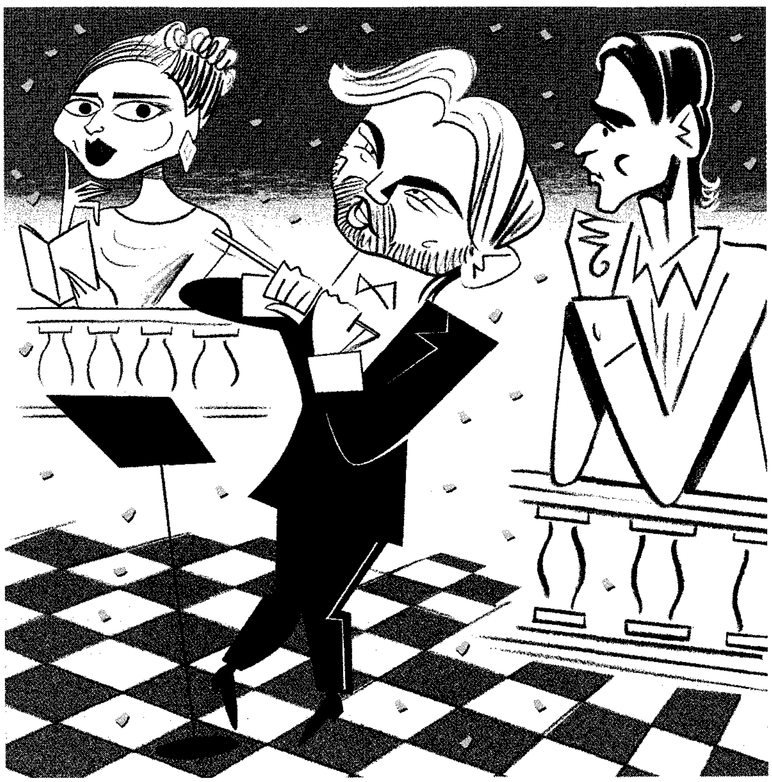
SWAN SONGS

A death-wish trifecta.

BY JOHN LAHR

This week, over the course of twenty-four hours, I saw three plays about suicide. I think I can say without fear of successful contradiction that this is a record. Of the twenty-four actors that I counted on the various stages, three did themselves in; one actually shot himself in the head three times—a victim of artistic license, not of poor marksmanship. The theatrical mortality rate was, therefore, well above the national average of .01 per cent (approximately 10.7 of every hundred thousand citizens). From this statistical analysis, I deduce that not only is the theatre dying but the characters onstage are dropping like flies.

Until the final beat of Terrence McNally's hilarious "Prelude and Liebestod," the second half of a twin bill under the collective title "The Stendhal Syndrome" (at Primary Stages' new complex, on East Fifty-ninth Street), I had no idea that I was about to witness a hat trick. (The first play, "Full Frontal Nudity," which, like the second, is well directed by Leonard Folgia, has a tour guide and her clients staring at Michelangelo's David and being coaxed into the state of aesthetic surrender that characterizes the evening's eponymous syndrome.) I want to thank the veteran playwright for his legerdemain—his narrative skill, his sense of fun, his love of music, and his ability to turn a threadbare theatrical trope into a surprising, complex gesture whose combination of vainglory and nihilism conveys unsettling but genuine exhilaration.



Richard Thomas is a histrionic conductor in "The Stendhal Syndrome."

ROBERT RISKO

For "Prelude and Liebestod," McNally places the audience in a concert hall, at the feet of a preening, histrionic conductor (Richard Thomas), who proceeds to whip both the musicians and himself into a crescendo of wild-eyed Wagnerian passion. Before the megalomaniacal maestro has even swanned up to the podium, a force field of antagonism has already been generated around him. Staring down from the box seats on opposite sides of the auditorium are the conductor's wife (the soigné Isabella Rossellini), who is thinking about bedding her lover, and an infatuated male fan (Yul Vásquez), who is thinking about bedding the conductor. By the podium sits the world-weary concertmaster (the droll Michael Countryman), who speaks the play's first line. He looks toward the wings, then turns back, and shoulders his violin. "Asshole," he says.

Later in the evening, the concertmaster casts his mournful eyes up at the conductor and says to himself, "The next Toscanini you're not. Hell, you ain't even the next Lenny Bernstein." But if McNally isn't lampooning Bernstein I'll eat my shorts. The conductor's unabashed vanity is the first giveaway. "I want to love but I've just never found anyone as interesting as me," he says. Then, there's the concert calisthenics—and Bernstein's habit of dramatic posturing on the podium. "Give them the profile, lots of profile," the conductor commands himself as he launches into the Liebestod from "Tristan und Isolde." "Move the body. They come for the body movement. Those fabulous, famous, far-reaching shoulders." The conductor also shares with Bernstein the pose of a heterosexual family man, which he struggles to maintain while at the same time trying to steal a glance at the boy who is ogling him. Looking over at the box where his wife sits perusing the program, he says, "The fucking bitch is fucking reading and you're conducting your fucking ass off. Jesus, I don't know why I bother. Yes, you do. You wanted to be married. No, you wanted to have children and you have to be married to have children." He goes on, "It's one thing to be straight . . . it's quite another to be in a straitjacket."

From the moment the conductor first picks up his baton, he is asking to be ravished. "Here it comes, this is it, the first crescendo!" he says. "God, that was good." The sumptuous sensuality of the music gradually calls out of him a roiling pornographic reverie. Observing the poised soprano (Jennifer Mudge), he thinks, "You're singing through the wrong hole, honey. This is twat music. Listen to it. . . . You're not singing, you're cuming. . . . We're making love up here. We're gonna have a trans-fan-fucking-figuration." The vulgarity is a piquant counterpoint to the exquisite sound; the erotic charge rings true.

When the vacancy of the conductor's life and the velocity of his career finally collide in his consciousness, he becomes delirious. In the last measures of the Liebestod—as the soprano sings of drowning and sinking into "supreme bliss"—the conductor merges with the music. It has passed through and into him; he answers its call and is transfigured by its passion. Picking up his baton with both hands, he raises it high above his head, then drives it into his abdomen. He dies in a shower of glitter and applause. As comic epiphanies go, McNally's marriage of ecstasy and extinction has its own delightfully perverse logic.

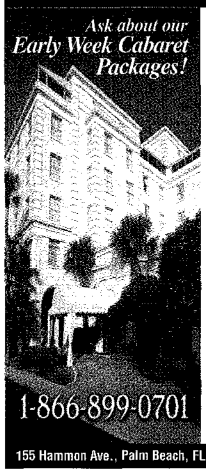
Paul Weitz's "Roulette," a farce about suburban anomie (at the John Houseman, under the direction of Trip Cullman), begins with the paterfamilias (Larry Bryggman), dressed in his executive armor of suit, tie, and briefcase, savoring a moment of early-morning solitude before going out to do battle with the world. He picks his paper up off the doorstep, gets his coffee, spreads the paper in front of him on the dining-room table, and begins to read. Almost as an afterthought, he reaches for his briefcase and pulls out a gun. He puts a bullet in the chamber, spins it, puts the barrel to his head, and pulls the trigger. Nothing happens. He clears the table, heads for the door, then pauses on the threshold for a little intake of breath, before stepping out into the bright emptiness of his day. This dumb show of despair is the play's most compelling moment.

In Weitz's anatomy of absence, the son (Shawn Hatosy) has problems with anger, the fractious teen-age daughter (Anna Paquin) with addiction. The affectless wife (Leslie Lyles) is cheating with the mendacious next-door neighbor (Mark Setlock), who is indifferent to everything but his own craven needs. All this dysfunction is shrewdly written but familiar comic territory. The interest here lies not so much in the stage incidents as in the characters' remove from their own feelings. They revolve around one another like planets whose orbits never intersect. In fact, the only way the deluded father can reveal his rage at his family is by gathering them together at the end of Act I and blowing his brains out.

This script being the product of a Hollywood screenwriter (Weitz co-wrote "Antz"), however, there is nothing so tragic that it can't be made upbeat. It turns out that the father didn't kill himself after all; he just rearranged his psyche. Before, he was an absent presence; now, eight months later, in Act II, he's a present absence. In his mind, home is now a Las Vegas casino; he's having a ball. His talk is excited, full of exploit, adventure, and sexuality. He views his family, without heartache, as the strangers they are. "You're—you're like a family to me," he says, as he takes leave of them. Weitz sends up suburbia only to replace it with a kind of Hollywood Superbia, where even suicide can be fun. Onstage, no one is truly changed by the events; the trouble for Weitz is that no one in the audience is, either.

In "Drowning Crow," Regina Taylor's African-American adaptation of Chekhov's "The Seagull" (a Manhattan Theatre Club production at the Biltmore), the aspiring writer, Constantine, a.k.a. C-Trip, doesn't wait for the last act to take his life; he shoots himself as the curtain rises. Apart from a character saying, "Hello, Mr. Godot," I can think of nothing that would bring a play to a more grinding halt. The show, which is notionally reset in the Gullah Islands of South Carolina, has no credible sense of place, no emotional reality, no character development. Constantine is ostensibly searching for a more potent way of presenting African-American life than his actress-mother's stage naturalism, but his rap outbursts succeed only in being banal: "Her theatre can't change the way we see / Her theatre has impact / of zero velocity."

"Drowning Crow," which is directed by Marion McClinton, is a bewildering, inert mess. Like a graffiti tag, it is an act of vandalism disguised as artistic expression. The show calls into question the M.T.C. as a producing entity. This is its second and most egregious miscue since it began staging plays on Broadway this year; failure seems to have gone to its head. ♦



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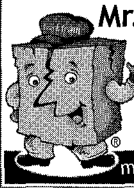
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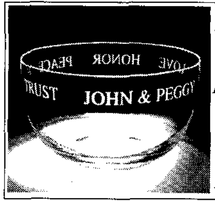
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MUSICAL EVENTS

RICH AND STRANGE

A "Tempest" opera by Thomas Adès.

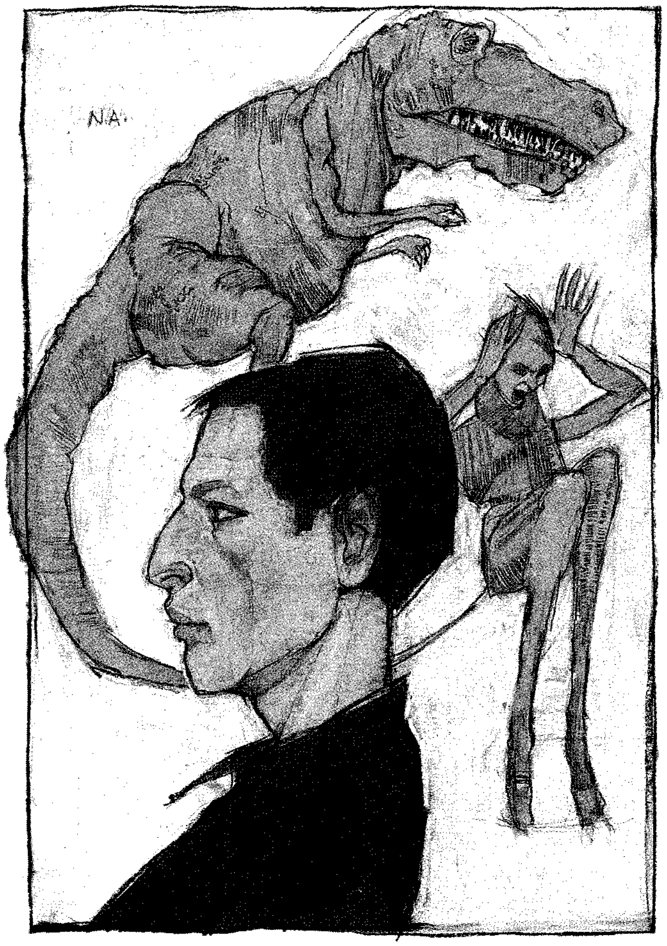
BY ALEX ROSS

I first heard the music of Thomas Adès on a gloomy spring day in Aldeburgh, England, in 1995. The composer was then twenty-four—a nervously confident youth who spoke in rumbling bass tones, like a very English Ving Rhames. The piece on display was "Living Toys," which featured the sort of everywhere-scurrying, chaos-theory music that composers under the influence of György Ligeti were writing at the time. But I heard something else, too—an articulate melancholy, which gathered itself into brief, sobbing pleas. Through a maze of styles and moods, the work took listeners far into a private world. Here was a composer who seemed capable of anything.

In the years that followed, Adès became famous, notorious, a bit overexposed—problems American composers only wish they had. His first opera, "Powder Her Face," was celebrated not so much for its razor-sharp characterizations as for its onstage blow job. His first big symphonic piece, "Asyla," had a much discussed, much imitated scherzo movement depicting a druggy night at a London club. In 1999, he dumbfounded a New York Philharmonic audience with a monumentally grim cantata entitled "America: A Prophecy," which contained the lines "Your cities will fall . . . It is foretold / Prepare." All the focus on the outré features of Adès's works disguised the fact that they were tied together with fantastically ornate thematic designs, as if the composer were intent on dressing animal energies in impeccable clothes.

Then came a period in which the new star of English music seemed uncertain of his direction. He had a commission from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and after stalling on one project he decided on short notice to tackle another: Shakespeare's "The Tempest." Deadlines loomed, the score was not ready. A no longer worshipful British press hinted that a fiasco might be in the offing. There were reports that fellow-composers were pitching in with the orchestration, that singers were complaining about the difficulty of their parts. Articles on the eve of the première characterized Adès as a purveyor of "facile cleverness" and "shallow sophistication" who had tried to do "too much too soon."

How much is too soon? To adapt Tom Lehrer's immortal line, when Schubert was Adès's age he had been dead for a year. "The Tempest" is the opposite of a disappointment; it is a masterpiece of airy beauty and eerie power. As if on schedule, Adès, at thirty-two, is now the major artist that his earliest works promised he would become.



With "The Tempest," Adès discovers a glowing new lyric voice.

There have been at least fifty operas based on "The Tempest," none of which have entered the repertory. Probably the most significant "Tempest"-inspired score is the incidental music that Sibelius wrote in 1925—a mesmerizing, many-sided work that cries out to be revived alongside a production of the play. Prospero, ruler of an enchanted island, is himself a kind of composer, prone to use music as the vessel of his magic. He manipulates the shipwrecked aristocrats of Naples and Milan, hypnotizes Caliban, and makes a match for his daughter Miranda all by way of "marvellous sweet music," "solemn and strange music," "a thousand twangling instruments," "that deep and dreadful organ-pipe." Even when Prospero abjures his art, he summons "heavenly music" to punctuate the act. He writes the cue for his own exit, directing the drama to the bitterly beautiful end.

Yet the melodious omnipotence of Prospero springs a trap on unsuspecting composers. His powers are essentially godlike—and God, for all His achievements in other media, has seldom made for a lively figure on the stage. Without the possibility of defeat, there is no potential for operatic melodrama: this is what undermined Frank Martin's formidable "Tempest" setting of 1956. Adès wisely assigned the libretto to Meredith Oakes, a seasoned playwright who had the guts to rewrite Shakespeare. They have solved the Prospero problem by making the great magician a more fallible, vulnerable being. He can still conjure storms and immobilize enemies, but he no longer shapes the wills of others. When Miranda falls in love with Ferdinand of Naples, it happens against her father's will, not in keeping with his design. And when, at the end, he offers to forgive his brother Antonio, who expelled him from the Duchy of Milan, Antonio snubs him, saying, "Your life has been my death." As in many revisionist theatrical productions, this Prospero is a man of genius but also a brooding neurotic. In operatic terms, he comes to resemble one of Verdi's controlling fathers, or, even more closely, Wagner's disempowered Wotan.

Oakes also plays fast and loose with Shakespeare's words. Grand speeches are telescoped into tight couplets that sometimes read like pop lyrics. Purists may find these changes alarming—I was distressed to find that "Full fathom five," three of my favorite words in the language, had become "Five fathoms deep"—but veterans of contemporary premières will be relieved to find that for once a librettist and a composer have taken charge of a sacred text and made it their own. Too often these days, we get Cliffs Notes operas that effortfully string together one famous literary line after another. This libretto is designed to be sung—"Full fathom five" is, on close inspection, short on long vowels—and Adès makes the most of it.

The opera begins with a roiling overture, similar in tone to Sibelius' "Storm" prelude. Throughout the first act, a fraught mood prevails. Prospero tends to sing in heavyhearted, downward-curving phrases, often made up of alternating semitones and fifths—a zigzagging pattern that also occurs in the melancholic slow movement of "Asyla." The baritone Simon Keenlyside sang the role at Covent Garden and gave it a doom-drunk, Wagnerian heft. The spirit Ariel, by contrast, scales the heights of the soprano range and stays there for perilously long periods of time. In her first minute onstage, the singer has to belt out seventeen high E's. Somehow, the brilliant American soprano Cyndia Sieden subdued this homicidal part, and had the audience laughing in amazement.

In Act II, Prospero's frozen world begins to melt, and Adès discovers a glowing new lyric voice. Earlier in his career, he tended to dart in and out of worlds of songful simplicity, seemingly afraid to venture too deep; now he settles in for long, ardent stretches. The epiphany not only of the opera but perhaps of his entire career to date comes in Caliban's aria "Friends don't fear"—a version of the speech "The isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs." This is ravishing music in purest A major, though the notes of the scale blend together in ever-changing, shimmering combinations. The effect is of light flooding the scene, of warmth rushing in. Ian Bostridge, at the première, delivered the aria with hushed passion, as if afraid of waking from a dream. From this point on, the lyric wonders multiply: at the end of the act, Ferdinand and Miranda have a love duet that might have brought a tear to Puccini's eye, and in Act III leading characters join together in a radiant quintet—"How good they are, how bright, how grand"—that builds in waves over a chaconnelike ground bass.

The ultimate magic of this "Tempest" is that everything comes from a single harmonic matrix. The music of Ferdinand and Miranda and Caliban sounds luxuriously tonal, but it is of a piece with the much tougher music that is heard at the outset. When Caliban and Ariel regain possession of the island, in an epilogue to Shakespeare, Prospero's chains of intervals recur, except that the claustrophobic semitone has widened one degree and the cycle moves not down but up. Ariel sings mere vowels—"A-i-e"—from a hidden place above the stage. The music lifts you into the stratosphere, and you don't want to leave.

Covent Garden assembled a tremendous cast for the occasion—not only Keenlyside, Bostridge, and Sieden but also Christine Rice, as Miranda; Toby Spence, as Ferdinand; Philip Langridge, as the King of Naples; John Daszak, as Antonio; Gwynne Howell, as Gonzalo; and Christopher Maltman, as Sebastian. I wasn't sure about the archaic sci-fi look of Tom Cairns's production—an island world strewn with giant fish, a dinosaur, and various laser-beam shapes—but he gave excellent direction to the singers. I liked how Antonio first stood with the others in the Act III quintet, as if he were going to join in the reconciliation, and then sank to the side in disgust. Adès himself conducted, drawing a riot of color from the orchestra. I could sense the anxiety of the performers turning by degrees into elation, and the no less anxious audience responding in kind. A huge, stamping-and-shouting roar greeted the composer when he took his solo bow—a final storm of sound on the enchanted island. ♦

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THE BACK PAGE BY PAUL SLANSKY

THE ELEVENTH HUNDRED DAYS: THE QUIZ

1. During his Christmas vacation in Texas, what did George W. Bush do for the first time since taking office?

(a) He hunted quail, though reporters were not permitted to see him holding a gun.

(b) He cooked quail, though reporters were prevented from seeing him at the stove.

(c) He ate snail, though reporters were not allowed to see if he chewed it or just swallowed it whole.

(d) He called Quayle, though reporters were not privy to what they talked about.

2. After George W. Bush tried to distance himself from the premature "Mission Accomplished" banner on the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln by implying that it was all the ship's crew's idea (although, in fact, the banner had been made by the White House), which Democratic Presidential candidate said, "I guess the next thing we're going to hear is that the sailors told him to wear the flight suit and prance around on the aircraft carrier"?

(a) General Wesley Clark.

(b) Governor Howard Dean.

(c) Reverend Al Sharpton.

(d) Senator John Kerry.

3. Complete George W. Bush's statement: "I want to remind you all that in order to fight and win the war it requires an expenditure of money that is ____________ with keeping a promise to our troops to make sure that they're well paid, well trained, well equipped."

(a) commensurate

(b) commemorate

(c) commiserate

(d) commensable

4. What was Attorney General John Ashcroft rebuked for by a federal judge?

(a) Using provisions of the Patriot Act against strip-club operators in Las Vegas.

(b) His efforts to obtain the medical records of women who had partial-birth abortions to see if the procedures were really necessary.

(c) Not recusing himself sooner from the investigation into the White House leak regarding Valerie Plame.

(d) Deleting passages from a study on diversity in the Justice Department which were critical of the department's treatment of minority employees.

5. When a reporter suggested that the Bush Administration's refusal to allow France, Germany, and Russia to bid on Iraq reconstruction projects might violate international law, what did George W. Bush say?

(a) "Haven't you seen what I think of international law?"

(b) "Well, I guess they'll just have to put me in international jail."

(c) "International law? I better call my lawyer; he didn't bring that up to me."

(d) "You know what violated international law? 9/11."

Who's who?

6. Darryl Dent.

7. John B. (Bill) Calhoun.

8. Madeleine Albright.

9. David Greenberg.

(a) The member of George W. Bush's Alabama National Guard squadron who said that he remembered Bush reporting for duty during the 1972 period in which other Guardsmen claim never to have seen him.

(b) The former official who reacted to Saddam Hussein's capture by saying, "Do you suppose that the Bush Administration has Osama bin Laden hidden away somewhere and will bring him out before the election?"

(c) The soldier killed in Iraq whose funeral—like the funerals of every other soldier killed in Iraq—George W. Bush didn't attend, even though his was held only three miles from the White House.

(d) The historian who said that, while George W. Bush was the ideological son of Ronald Reagan, "stylistically, he's the son of Nixon."

10. True or false: A Republican Senate aide who watched George W. Bush's press conference after the capture of Saddam Hussein said of Bush, "He was on gloat-control drugs devised by the N.I.H. for just this occasion."

11. What did Condoleezza Rice say when Oprah Winfrey asked her to reveal something about George W. Bush that would surprise people?

(a) "He knows where Canada is."

(b) "He's an excellent Scrabble player."

(c) "He eats fast."

(d) "He pronounces 'nuclear' correctly in private conversations."

12. True or false: At a Pennsylvania hunt involving the release of five hundred pen-raised pheasants, Vice-President Dick Cheney refused to participate, asking, "Where's the sport in shotgunning a bunch of tame birds?"

Answers:
(1) a, (2) a, (3) c, (4) b, (5) c, (6) c, (7) a, (8) b, (9) d, (10) True, (11) c, (12) False—Cheney killed more than seventy pheasants himself.

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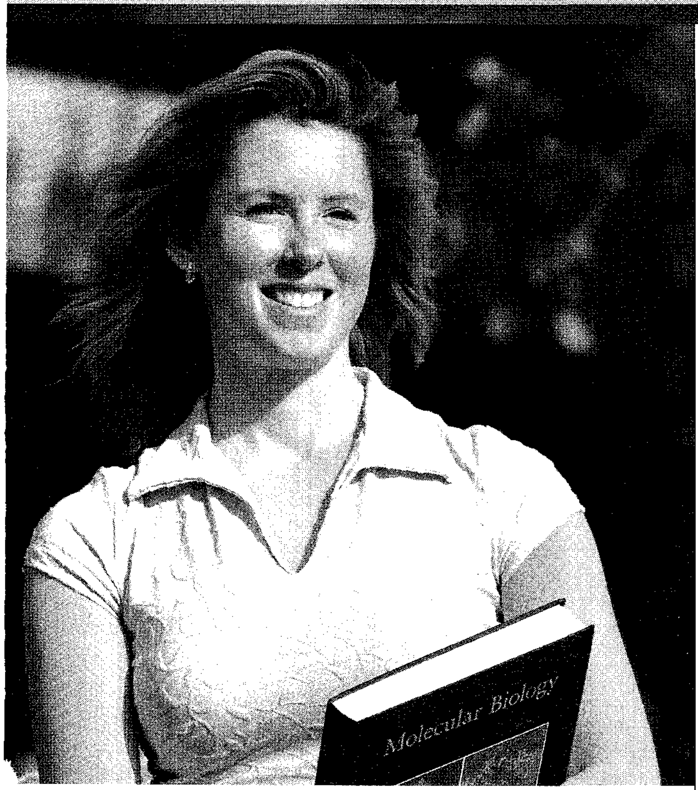

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